TLE

WM. TYRRELL & CO.
TORONTO

SHORT STUDIES

OF

SHAKESPEARE'S PLOTS

SHORT STUDIES

OF

SHAKESPEARE'S PLOTS

BY

CYRIL RANSOME, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF MODERN LITERATURE AND HISTORY IN THE YORKSHIRE COLLEGE
OF THE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY, AND FORMERLY A POSTMASTER
OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1904

All rights reserved

First Edition 1890. *Reprinted* 1893, 1898, 1904

PREFACE

THE following studies of Shakespeare were originally delivered as popular lectures before a mixed audience. Their design is to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, and to call attention to a method of teaching Shakespeare somewhat different from that which is now employed in colleges and schools. That method, which treats the plays of Shakespeare more as convenient collections of hard words and unusual idioms than as masterpieces of literature, seems to me to be in many respects extremely unsatisfactory. It is repellent rather than attractive to the student, and it teaches him from the very outset to pursue his studies by a wrong road. Under its influence, the play as a whole tends to be neglected, words are exalted to the exclusion of thoughts, and study is far too much on the lines adopted by the young lady who is said "to have fastened down the text with a piece of elastic in order that it might not interfere with her learning the notes."

This method has been adopted partly because the teaching of literature in schools is for the most part in the hands of men who have been accustomed to study Roman and Greek authors from the philological rather than from the literary standpoint, and partly because of the manner in which modern teaching has been regulated in accordance with the requirements of examinations. Schoolmasters demand that questions should be set on points which are most generally taught, and examiners wish to elicit answers which are capable of being reduced to an arithmetical standard—in other words, which are easy to mark. The result is that teachers and examiners have fastened upon the philological and antiquarian side of Shakespearian study, and the unlucky schoolboy is likely enough to forget or never to learn that there is any other side at all. Indeed, I have seen examination papers for which the young lady's method would supply a perfectly satisfactory preparation. On the other hand, if the teacher tries to rise above this mere word teaching, he tends to rush into the other extreme, and to cram his pupils with phrases culled from the works of Coleridge, or Goethe, or Dowden, which they can only imperfectly understand, and which they reproduce like parrots in answer to any manner of examination question.

To my mind the first object of teachers of Shake-

speare should be to create an interest in the plays themselves. For this purpose the work in hand should first be read through as a whole, and the students taught to ask themselves at the end of each scene, or in the longer scenes at moderate intervals, the following or similar questions. First, what has this scene done to advance the story? Second, what light has been thrown by it upon the characters of the persons concerned? Third, what light has been thrown upon the circumstances under which the events which form the plot took place? These questions should in the first place be put to the students, and only when they have done their best to answer them should further information be given by the teacher, who should carefully teach the students how to read the text in order to find the answers to the questions. When this has been done, the students may begin to study the text word by word with the aid of such notes as are supplied by many editions of Shakespeare's plays. Their interest having been aroused, they will be in a position to appreciate exactness in determining the meaning of words, and to value any insight they may gain into the significance of particular phrases, because of the light thrown by it upon knowledge which they have already attained. When the play has been studied as a whole, and also word for word, it will be time to introduce the

student to what may be called the higher criticism, which he will then be in a position to profit by and to enjoy.

Such teaching I believe to be far more suited to the wants and understanding of the average student than that which is now in use. There is no reason why questions should not be framed in examinations to test the knowledge so acquired, though I admit that the answers will not be so easy to mark; and its adoption would do something to revive the popularity of Shakespeare in the mind of a generation which, if the present system is persisted in, is likely to detest him with as thorough-going an aversion as if he had written his great masterpieces in Latin or Greek.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
HAMLET	1
JULIUS CÆSAR	42
MACBETH	79
KING LEAR	118
RICHARD II	162
OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE	199
CORIOLANUS	239
THE TEMPEST	269

TO THE READERS

In the sphere of literary criticism there is no such thing as finality, and if I venture to place before you a new, or at any rate a neglected, treatment of Shakespeare, I can only crave indulgence for my temerity on the plea that experiment is necessary for progress, and that if nought were attempted, nothing would be done.

At the commencement, therefore, I ask you to carefully banish from your mind all preconceived notions about the plays. Be as though Hamlet or King Lear had never been heard of before. Forget what you have read of the ghost, of Ophelia, of Cassius or Miranda. Above all, banish from your memory any representation of a Shakespearian play at which you have been present, and, Shakespeare in hand, let us endeavour by a patient study of the text, Act by Act and Scene by Scene, to unravel the method and design of the great master, not from any theory of his mind or art but from his own words. And let me remind you that to do this is to throw upon Shakespeare his full responsibility as a literary artist. Neither acting nor scenery will serve his

turn with us. What he has to say he must say himself, and we may be sure that, if we have the wit to see it, we shall find in the text the key to every problem which the story may suggest.

In our study we will not at first occupy time in researches either into etymology or mythology, into various misreadings or curious interpretations, but taking the plain text as our guide, will endeavour to follow the plays as they must have been followed by the audiences of Shakespeare's own day.

HAMLET

Part I

What, then, is the impression which Shakespeare desires his audience to gather from the first scene? The platform before the castle is represented, and the nightly change of sentries is proceeding. Agitation shows itself in the words of the relieving sentry, Bernardo, who on catching the first glimpse of the moving figure of his rade shouts "Who's there?" instead of waiting, according to the rules of the service, until the man on guard has challenged him. But why is this unsoldierly conduct unnoticed by Francisco? Shakespeare supplies the answer, that his powers of observation have been dulled by the bitterness of the night and the numbness incident to distress of mind.

"'Tis bitter cold, and I am sick at heart."

Francisco being about to go, Bernardo displays a notable anxiety lest he should be left alone, and desires his comrade to hurry on Horatio and Marcellus, who were to share his watch; and punctual to their hour

they are present, even while he is speaking of them. Very different are the attitudes of the two new-comers. Marcellus, the soldier, is serious, Horatio, the civilian, jocular; and Shakespeare immediately takes means to explain to his audience the reason of Horatio's forced jocularity, the seriousness of Marcellus, and Bernardo's evident anxiety. It appears that Marcellus and Bernardo have twice seen a ghost, a real objective ghost for he has been seen at the same time by two persons. Horatio, however, has refused to be convinced of its reality, and at their request has agreed to share their watch, so that if the ghost again makes its appearance he may speak to it, and add his testimony to theirs. Bernardo has hardly begun to retell the story of the phenomenon, when at the stroke of one the ghost appears.

Bernardo's remark, "In the same figure, like the king that's dead," for the first time tells the audience one of the main points in the situation—the death of the king. No doubt of the reality of the apparition is any longer felt or expressed by Horatio, who proceeds to address himself to the king-like spectre. The ghost, however, stalks away regardless of his call. It is now the turn of Marcellus and Bernardo to rally Horatio upon his scepticism, and their conversation serves to emphasize for the spectators the reality of the likeness to the late king. A discussion naturally follows as to the meaning of the ghost's appearance. It is explained as portentous of some *future* danger to the state, and

Marcellus connects it with the preparations for war which are going on before their eyes, the causes of which are to the common soldiers as yet unknown. Horatio, however, as a man with better information, is able to furnish his comrades with a reason. The late king, by slaying Fortinbras of Norway in single combat, gained from him certain lands, and these his son, young Fortinbras, is now preparing to regain by force of arms. This is the cause of the preparation for war, and may well be connected with the appearance of the spectre. Horatio, as a scholar, mentions that such phenomena were seen in Rome on the eve of Cæsar's murder, and the matter is being thus satisfactorily explained when the ghost again makes its appearance.

Again Horatio essays to speak with it, and now he offers the threefold alternative which the superstition of the day regarded as affording the reasons for the unquiet rest of departed souls. (1) "If there be any good thing to be done, that may to thee do ease and grace to me, speak to me." (2) "If thou art privy to thy country's fate, which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O speak!" (3) "If thou hast uphoarded in thy life extorted treasure in the womb of earth,——" But the ghost will not answer, and in a moment, as the cock crows, it is gone. Foiled again, the witnesses decide to tell what they have seen to young Hamlet, "for, upon my life, this spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him," and with this decision the scene closes. Observe that one

thing never strikes them. There is not even a suggestion that foul play in his death was the reason of the king's unrest. It must be taken, then, for granted that such a suspicion had not even a place in the public mind of Denmark. It is the future and not the past which is regarded with apprehension.

In the next scene (Act i. Scene 2) Shakespeare takes us to the court, where we find the king and his household assembled in a sort of witenagemot, and among them young Hamlet, son of the late sovereign. To them Claudius makes a formal speech, and from it the audience acquire certain pieces of most important information. They learn that the present king is the brother of his predecessor, and that he has come to the throne to the exclusion of his young nephew, exactly as had happened in Norway, and also we may add in England in the case of Alfred the Great, a succession, therefore, which was in strict accord with the practice of the North. They learn too that shortly after his accession he had married the widow of the late king, and that in so doing he had carried with him the consent of the Danish nobility. This affords a further proof that in the case of the late king's death no suspicion of foul play had been abroad. After recapitulating these points the king adverts to Norway, and formally names ambassadors, who are to request the reigning king of that country to put his veto upon the enterprise of his nephew, young Fortinbras, of which we heard in the last scene.

This done, a new character appears, Laertes. He

is a member of a family of whom we shall hear much, son of Polonius, an old counsellor of the king, and brother to the heroine Ophelia. His present wish is to go back to Paris in spite of his father's disinclination, and the king grants his request. Claudius then turns to Hamlet. That prince has stood moodily by, and his gloomy face and reproachful air seem to have had their effect upon the king and his newly married wife, for they turn smartly upon him and try the effect both of flattery and argument to change his temper. Hamlet's answers are bitter. He indignantly repudiates his mother's phrase of "*seems*," and declares that it is not

> "Forms, modes, shows of grief
> That can denote me truly: these indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play:
> But I have that within that passeth show;
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe."

It is in vain that the king brings to bear upon him the stereotyped argument that death of fathers is common, and offers to treat him as his own son, in proof of which affection he implores him not to go back to college at Wittenberg; and Hamlet, in whom, unlike Laertes, the sense of duty is strong, consents to remain. The king then, with an expression of joy, retires, and the court with him, leaving Hamlet alone.

What, then, is the situation so far? Hamlet, a youth at college, has been summoned home by the news of his father's death. On his arrival, or shortly afterwards,

his mother marries his uncle, who with the consent of the nation has ascended the throne. He himself is treated with every consideration, and, so far as we can see, with the honour due to his rank. But what is his frame of mind? On being left alone, he instantly breaks out into a soliloquy upon the subject of suicide, and we learn that the cause of his distress is the hasty marriage of his mother.

> "A little month; or ere those shoes were old,
> With which she followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears; . . . she married with mine uncle,
> My father's brother.
> . . . . . .
> It is not, nor it cannot come to, good;
> But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue!"

Such are his feelings; but if so, why did he not escape from them by an immediate return to Wittenberg? He had the opportunity, yet he did not take it. Why was it? Was it because he hated to take any definite step, and that he seized eagerly the entreaties of his mother and his uncle as an excuse to stay? Remember, no rumour of the ghost had yet reached him, but so great is his sensibility that he is already considering the desirability of suicide.

It is at this moment that Horatio and the soldiers come to announce the appearance of the ghost. Hamlet is at once all attention, and he shows the same intellectual dexterity in cross-examining the witnesses as he had done in parrying the arguments of the king and queen. He catches at evidence of inconsistency in the

story. He asks exactly the right question to determine whether the ghost was a ghost or a living man dressed to personate one. Finally, he shows no want of resolution, but declares his intention of seeing it for himself. Then for the first time comes the suggestion from Hamlet, in soliloquy, that the appearance is connected with foul play.

> "My father's spirit in arms! all is not well;
> I doubt some foul play: would the night were come!
> Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
> Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes."

Shakespeare employs the interval till night by carrying his audience a little further into the plot. We remember that Laertes is to go to Paris. In saying farewell to his sister (Act i. Scene 3) he, brother-like, takes the opportunity to read her a lecture upon her relations with Hamlet. That prince, it appears, has been making love to her, and the theory of the Polonius household is that Hamlet's intentions are not serious. Laertes takes up the simple line of argument that the Crown Prince does not marry the Prime Minister's daughter, and he implores his sister to be circumspect in her conduct. Ophelia, who is no Juliet, but a mere tool in the hands of her family, agrees with him.

> "I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,
> As watchman to my heart."

Fancy Juliet saying this! It at once marks Ophelia's position among Shakespeare's heroines. She is the doll.

But though a child in mental development she is not altogether free from taint. At least her answer to her brother, and her suggested counsel to him, savour of an indelicacy of thought from which Shakespeare's other heroines, however plain-spoken in mere language, are altogether exempt. Laertes, however, smartly puts her down. It is not a sister's business to lecture her brother, and at that moment Polonius makes his appearance.

Polonius is the comic character of the play. As Shakespeare advanced in art he threw aside the rude merriment of the clown, and contrived to satisfy the pit's demand for humour by the introduction of a laughable character as one of the regular *dramatis personæ*, and in the earlier part of *Hamlet* this *rôle* is played by Polonius. Polonius is the true father of both Laertes and Ophelia. Greatness of mind is utterly absent from his system. He is fitted out with a stock of "old saws and modern instances," which serve as contrasts to the imbecility of his own behaviour. As a young man he has had the same pleasant trick of lecturing his friends as Laertes has now, and it has grown upon him. His loquaciousness has increased with his years. In figure he is ungainly to the point of exciting merriment, and though Shakespeare never raises laughter at mere deformity, he makes the combination of self-satisfied imbecility with ludicrous incompetence both of mind and body sufficiently amusing.

Polonius has already said farewell to his son. The

ship is waiting, the sail is set: and yet loquacity so far gets the better of the old man that a speech a page long follows. In it a series of copy-book maxims are tacked together. Each is excellent in its way, but all are made singularly humorous by the contrast they bear to the subsequent conduct of their utterer. "Give thy thoughts no tongue" is the first dogma of the most talkative man in the play. "Beware of entrance to a quarrel" is the advice thrown away on the most headstrong of young men. And among these sections of proverbial philosophy there is embalmed, like the fly in amber, one true guide of conduct. "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

As Laertes turns to go, he adjures his sister to remember his advice. What does the doll say? "'Tis in my memory locked, and you yourself shall keep the key of it." Brave words! But what does the doll do? Why, her very first answer to her father, 'So please you, something touching the lord Hamlet,' betrays the conversation about her lover. Polonius takes the same view of Hamlet that Laertes holds. Like his son, he is incapable of understanding the depth of pure affection. He looks on Hamlet's vows as the stock-in-trade of the seducer, and no more. Nor is Ophelia herself any better. A true girl understands her lover. Ophelia "does not know, my lord, what she should think." Ordered to talk no more to Hamlet, her dutiful answer is, "I shall obey, my lord." Such, then, are

Hamlet's dearest relations in life—his mother and the mistress of his heart. Is it any wonder that he despairs?

Evening has come, and Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus find themselves on the platform (Act i. Scene 4). It is very cold. A consciousness of the cause of their vigils subdues their spirits to seriousness. The least external event naturally is dealt with from a moral point of view. So Hamlet, hearing the loud revelry of the king, remarks on the injury done to the Danish character by the reputation for drunkenness under which the nation labours. From this he passes on to apply in general the bearing of this particular fact. Few men, he thinks, are fairly judged. Friends and enemies alike form their opinion from some solitary defect. The one thing which fastens itself upon the memory gives colour to the whole. This speech of Hamlet's requires careful study. It is introduced by Shakespeare apparently without need, and therefore it must have been designed by him either to give some important information about Hamlet's own character or to supply the audience with some caution or hint which would aid them in understanding the play. It may do both. If the former, it gives another instance of Hamlet's habit of seeking the moral significance of what he sees before him. His mind is distinctly subjective, not objective. He is never satisfied with grasping merely the surfaces of things: he is always asking for something more. Or it may convey a caution to the audience. Do not judge

Hamlet by one trait of his character: look rather at the whole man.

At this moment the ghost enters. Observe Hamlet's address to it. He covers every condition.

> "Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damned,
> Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,
> Be thy intents wicked or charitable . . .
> I will speak to thee."

These alternatives are never again absent from his mind. He reminds one of the soldier's prayer: "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul." He asks the reason why it, duly buried, again in complete steel "revisiteth the glimpses of the moon, making night hideous." The ghost beckons Hamlet to follow, and regardless of the entreaties of his companions, who fear for his life, Hamlet goes.

By this artifice Shakespeare secures that Hamlet alone should hear the ghost's message. Mark its speech. The design of the ghost is to work to a climax, and only when Hamlet's blood is frozen with the horror of the unknown, will it make its revelation.

> "If thou didst ever thy dear father love,—
> Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder."

Hamlet's horror-stricken question "*Murder?*" conclusively shows that the *idea of murder is new to him.* The agony of his soul, which even under the thought of his mother's hasty marriage had carried him to the verge of suicide,

is now intensified. More than this, he is confronted with an opportunity for action. His mother's marriage was an accomplished fact, legal if not conformable to good taste; but here was a murder to be revenged. The dreamy and sensitive youth is called to become the man of action.

He hails the change. "Haste me to know it, that I, with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love, may sweep to my revenge." That is exactly the sentiment which might be expected either from a man to whom consequences were nothing because he could not see them, or from a dreamy scholar who, not having yet been confronted with life, had no idea of the limits which the practical world sets upon action. In Hamlet's case it is the latter.

The ghost then relates to Hamlet the circumstances of the murder, which amount to a declaration that his brother, the present king, took his life by pouring poison into his ear while he was sleeping in his orchard. No external signs of violence appeared, and the plausible story that the death had been due to the sting of a serpent had been accepted as explaining the symptoms. This murder is to be revenged, but two limitations are placed by the ghost on Hamlet's course of action. "Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive against thy mother aught." That is, the punishment of the murderer was to be effected in such a way that the propriety of Hamlet's conduct in the matter should be evident, and secondly, in the revenge the wife was not

to be involved in the punishment of her husband. These directions having been given, the ghost vanishes.

Hamlet's first impulses are all for action. Everything but the order for revenge he will erase from his memory. Never again will he trust a smiling villain. He will keep his secret to himself. He declines to share it with his friends. Their inquisitiveness has to be satisfied with the answer that "it is an honest ghost." Their secrecy is secured by an oath, whose sanctity is attested by the apparition itself. Meanwhile, Hamlet has to form his first plan of action. To act at once on such evidence might be the part of a madman, but never of a philosopher. To appear as before with such a secret on his mind was equally out of the question. So he decides to gain time by counterfeiting madness, and imparts just a hint to his friends to keep their counsel, and not to betray his secret by word or deed.

"But come ;—
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,—
As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on—
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall
With arms encumbered thus, or this head-shake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As, *Well, we know ;*—or, *We could, an if we would ;*—
Or, *If we list to speak ;*—or, *There be, an if they might ;*—
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught of me :—This not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you,
Swear !"

This closes the first act. What is the plot so far? Hamlet, a young scholar (for I take the whole tone of the play to be of more value than a casual date, which would make Hamlet a man of full age and his mother a woman in the decline of life) whose experience of the world has been gained from books and thought, is suddenly summoned home by the news of his father's death. On arriving he finds that his uncle has been accepted by the voice of the country as king, and that he has already become the husband of Hamlet's mother. The sensitive youth is bitterly shocked. The mother in whom he has believed has shown herself to be worthless. His faith in the sanctity of motherhood has received a fatal blow. Horrified at what he sees, his sensitive mind even contemplates suicide as a relief. At all costs he will escape. While in this mood he receives a new blow. The father whom he loved had been murdered by his uncle. The family life which he has accepted as ideal is a sham. Nay, too, he is on a sudden called to leave his studies and to take an active part in affairs of the most delicate complexity. The duty of avenging his father's death is entrusted to him, and this at a moment when he realises fully his own isolation and the untrustworthiness of mankind. What line he will take is the problem to be worked out. This time alone will show.

The audience having in the last scene been worked up to the highest pitch of excitement, Shakespeare now provides a scene which, while carrying forward the

development of his main idea, shall serve as a rest. He wishes to show the rottenness of the society in which Hamlet finds himself. This is essential to the understanding of Hamlet's position, and in Act ii. Scene 1 Shakespeare effects his purpose by means of a conversation between Polonius and his agent Reynaldo. In it he exhibits the cunning of the former and the utterly low expectation he has formed of his son's conduct from his own experiences. This done, we are brought back to the main plot by the entrance of Ophelia.

Hamlet's belief in humanity has received a third shock. Already he has found his uncle a murderer, his mother unfaithful to his father, and the murderer and seducer wearing the crown of his father amidst the applause of his countrymen. There is, however, one person in whom he yet believes—Ophelia, the love of his youth. To her he has gone in his affliction; but what has happened. "She, as her father commanded, did repel his letters and denied him access." For Hamlet there could only be one possible explanation of her conduct. She must be turning to him the cold shoulder because he has lost his crown. Such, in all probability, is the true explanation of Hamlet's conduct. It is under the influence of this idea that he visits her, and goes through the speechless leave-taking so pathetically described.

> "He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
> And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,

He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it."

Can she, thinks he, be the Ophelia of old?

"Long stayed he so;
At last,—a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,—
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being: that done, he lets me go:
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes;
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And, to the last, bended their light on me."

Such was the leave-taking in which Hamlet renounced not only his love for Ophelia, but his belief in woman. Polonius, to whom Ophelia dutifully relates the incident, places quite a different construction upon the scene. He regards it, not as it was, the bitter but final severance of Hamlet's affection for Ophelia, but as a complete explanation of the recent eccentricity of Hamlet's behaviour. He admits that his view of Hamlet's relations with Ophelia was wrong, but imputes his mistake to the over-suspiciousness of old age; and with his mouth full of news hurries off to the king and queen.

Meanwhile, the king's conscience has made him a diligent watcher of Hamlet. Claudius is an able man; and though he believes his guilt to be unknown, he is careful to take due precautions for the security of his ill-gotten position. No sooner has he noted the change

in Hamlet's behaviour than he devises means to ascertain its cause (Act ii. Scene 2). The theory that suggests itself to him is that Hamlet is disappointed at missing the succession. If this is so, he is very likely to prove a conspirator, and to test the truth of his view the king determines to set society to work. Society in Denmark is represented by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, it matters not which; they are merely Tweedledum and Tweedledee, "like in aught else as one egg's like another." They are

> "To draw him on to pleasures; and to gather,
> So much as from occasions you may glean,
> Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus,
> That, opened, lies within our remedy."

As they go out Polonius hurries in, proud of his supposed discovery. "I have found the very cause of Hamlet's lunacy." The king's anxiety is shown by his words, "O, speak of that; that I do long to hear"; and the queen's conscience in hers, "I doubt it is no other, but the main; his father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage." Polonius's explanation is, however, delayed a moment by the arrival of ambassadors, who announce that the war-like attitude of Norway has given way to explanation, and that the forces levied against Denmark are to be employed in an expedition to Poland. Then Polonius, armed with one of Hamlet's love-letters as evidence, tells his story. The cause of Hamlet's madness (it appears now that Hamlet's madness is a

recognised fact) is the rejection of his love by Ophelia. The pride of Polonius is boundless; and his indelicacy such that he is prepared to exhibit his daughter as a decoy, while he and the king will lie concealed behind the arras to watch the event.

Is Hamlet mad? That is the question with which Shakespeare now deals, and he begins by comparing the state of his wit with that of the self-satisfied old fool Polonius, who eagerly snatches the opportunity of an interview. The humour of his conversation lies in the circumstance that Hamlet's remarks bear one meaning to the audience, who are in the secret, and another to Polonius, who is not. "Do you know me, my lord?" says Polonius, with the unpleasant indelicacy of those who think no decency needful in dealing with a madman. "Excellent well; you are a fishmonger," *i.e.* one who is come to fish for news, or a retailer of stale news. "Not I," says the literal Polonius. "Then I would you were so honest a man." Hamlet just introduces sufficient references to Ophelia, who is nothing to him now, as to keep up Polonius's delusion, and then sends the pit into fits of laughter by pretending to read from his book a literal description of the appearance and character of the addle-headed old simpleton before him.

"Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here, that old men have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum; and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with weak hams: all of which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it

not honesty to have it thus set down ; for you yourself, sir, should be as old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backwards."

It is next the turn of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet was really glad to see them, and his opening address is that of hearty welcome ; but their constrained manner soon shows him that there is something in the wind. Hamlet has no difficulty in extracting from them the confession that the good king and queen have sent them to him. He discovers from their talk that they are of opinion that his odd manner is due to disappointed ambition, or if not, to disappointed love. Hamlet repels both suggestions. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern having announced the arrival of certain players, the conversation turns upon the drama ; and in the course of this talk Shakespeare contrives to introduce much artistic criticism, in which truth is maintained by Hamlet, and shallowness exemplified by the remarks of Polonius.

The prospect of a play suggests to Hamlet the possibility of testing the veracity of the ghost by reproducing before the king and queen the supposed incidents of the murder, just as in France they test the guilt of accused criminals by their behaviour when confronted with the circumstances of their crime. To do something of this kind Hamlet felt was necessary in order to complete the chain of evidence. To murder a man on the unsupported evidence of a ghost was absurd, and moreover it would be foolish, for what

likelihood was there that the Danes would impute the murder of Claudius to anything but disappointed ambition? Was it probable that the story of the ghost would be received as an adequate defence? How would it be if the ghost was an emissary of the evil one commissioned to lure him onward to an unpardonable crime? On the other hand, if the story told by the ghost was true, the king might be expected to show some symptoms of guiltiness, and Hamlet could take his measures accordingly.

> "I'll have these players
> Play something like the murder of my father,
> Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
> I'll tent him to the quick; if he but blench,
> I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
> May be the devil: and the devil hath power
> To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and, perhaps,
> Out of my weakness and my melancholy
> (As he is very potent with such spirits),
> Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
> More relative than this;—the play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king."

But while Hamlet is laying his plans for this, the king is not idling. His first business is to examine Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, but from these worthies he learns little or nothing. Indeed, their reluctance to admit that Hamlet had got the better of them leads them to give a false account of the interview. Hamlet had by no means been "niggard of question." On the contrary, the questioning had been all on his side.

The next step of the king is to bring Hamlet and Ophelia together where he and Polonius can overhear their conversation. In what follows, Ophelia, encouraged by the queen, tries to win back the affection which she believed she had lost through her own fault; but Hamlet preserves a distant attitude, and, so far as his remarks are intelligible to her, seems to congratulate her on having escaped an alliance with such a wretch as himself.

The effect of this conversation on Ophelia, on Polonius, and on the king is in each case different. Ophelia is convinced of the reality of Hamlet's madness. Polonius is satisfied that his love for Ophelia has passed away. The king alone penetrates the mystery, and is prompt with measures to guard against the danger which he foresees.

> "Love! his affections do not that way tend;
> Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
> Was not like madness. There's something in his soul,
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood;
> And, I do doubt, the hatch and the disclose
> Will be some danger; which for to prevent,
> I have, in quick determination,
> Thus set it down: He shall with speed to England
> For the demand of our neglected tribute;
> Haply, the seas, and countries different,
> With variable objects, shall expel
> This something-settled matter in his heart;
> Whereon his brains still beating, puts him thus
> From fashion of himself."

To this plan Polonius agrees, but suggests that after the

performance of the play his mother should interview Hamlet, and see whether she could unravel the mystery. If not, it would be best either to send him to England or to put him under restraint.

"*King.* It shall be so ;
Madness in great ones must not unwatched go."

At the beginning of Act iii. Scene 2 we find Hamlet instructing the players in their part ; and as if to guard against the audience falling into the mistake that Hamlet was mad, Shakespeare puts into his mouth a most admirable piece of literary criticism. That delivered, Hamlet's next business was to prepare Horatio, and to explain to him exactly what he was to do, for as Horatio had himself seen the ghost, he would be a most valuable witness to the truth of Hamlet's assertions.

"*Hamlet.* There is a play to-night before the king ;
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee of my father's death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe my uncle : if his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen ;
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face ;
And, after, we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming."

There is, however, not the slightest necessity for

elaborate comparison. The play touches the king's conscience to the quick, and when he sees before his eyes the verisimilitude of the poisoning in the garden, and hears that the next scene will exhibit the love-making of the murderer and the widow, he can contain himself no longer. He rises from his seat, retires from the room, and the performance is broken off amidst a scene of confusion. There is no more room for doubt. As Hamlet puts it, "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound."

The effect of this certainty was to confront Hamlet with the necessity for action. We must remember that the orders of the ghost were explicit. Hitherto he had been engaged in securing corroborative evidence; but he had now satisfied himself of his uncle's guilt. Clearly his next duty was to "revenge the foul and unnatural murder" which had been committed. But some members of the audience might not yet be satisfied, and to remove all doubt Shakespeare contrived a scene in which the king should himself confess his guilt.

Already we know that he is haunted with remorse, but no word from himself has indicated the nature of his crime. In Act iii. Scene 3 we have a distinct acknowledgment of guilt.

> "O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
> It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
> A brother's murder."

Nor has he repented of his crime. Pray, indeed, he

would; and if he could retain the profits of his sin, he would like to be pardoned.

> "But, O, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? *Forgive me my foul murder!*
> That cannot be; since I am still possessed
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,—
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
> May one be pardoned, and retain the offence?"

He cannot give it up. Yet he will fall on his knees; but were he to perish now he would die, by his own confession, as guilty as his brother who died—

> "Cut off even in the blossoms of his sin,
> Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled."

And at this very moment it seems as if such a fate would be his. For Hamlet, proceeding upstairs to his mother's chamber, catches sight of the murderer.

Now is the moment for Hamlet to wreak his vengeance, while the audience are in full sympathy with him. But he fails to do so, and for a reason so refined that it must be stated in his own words.

> "Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
> And now I'll do it:—and so he goes to heaven;
> And so am I revenged? That would be scanned:
> A villain kills my father; and for that,
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
> He took my father grossly, full of bread;
> With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
> And how his audit stands, who knows, save heaven?

> . . . And am I then revenged,
> To take him [Claudius] in the purging of his soul,
> When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?"

No, he will aim at a much more terrible retribution.

> "Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:
> When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage;
> . . . . . .
> At gaming, swearing; or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in't:—
> Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven;
> And that his soul may be as damned and black
> As hell, whereto it goes."

This is the climax of the play. To kill the king now, and to claim the crown as his right, would be the natural sequel of what has gone before. Led away by a subtle quibble about killing a man at his prayers who had murdered another in his sleep, Hamlet fails to take advantage of the opportunity that has been offered to him. In the further development of the story we shall be able to trace Shakespeare's view of the consequences of his procrastination.

Part II

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men,
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

These lines might well be Shakespeare's commentary upon Hamlet himself. At the moment he declined to

kill the king he had it in his power to do so with effect. The swooning of Claudius was fresh in the mind of the populace. At that moment, and at it only, were the Danes likely to believe the story of the ghost. The facts would have hung together. Horatio would have appeared as a corroborating witness. The sudden execution of vengeance the moment the king's guilt was proved would have seemed natural and even praiseworthy in the son of the popular King Hamlet. The honour of the queen would have been untainted by cohabitation with a man whom she knew to be the murderer of her former husband. Nay, even the fate of the king, stricken down in the midst of his unrepented sin, would have made the revenge of Hamlet complete. The hour had come but not the man, and what is the sequel?

From the moment when Hamlet refused to kill the king, the conditions under which he was acting alter. Up to this time he has been called upon to act merely as a detective, and the assumption of madness has enabled him to do so unobserved. He has now shown his hand. The king is well aware that his guilt is known, and with the ability of a conspirator and the energy of a man of action he at once takes steps to remove the danger from his path. Hamlet must perish, and the interest of the play lies partly in watching the results of Hamlet's failure to seize the opportunity when it was offered, partly in watching the plots by which the king taxes his ingenuity to rid himself of his rival.

Immediately on seeing the king's illness the queen sends for Hamlet. Had Hamlet slain the king, this interview would have been avoided. As it is, the meeting (Act iii. Scene 4) is completely disastrous; for Polonius, hiding behind the arras, is killed by Hamlet in mistake for the king. His death is the first retribution for Hamlet's indecision. Polonius may be foolish and contemptible. In the matter of his treatment of Ophelia's affections, he may even be the subject of our reprobation, but he has done nothing worthy of death, and no verdict could acquit Hamlet of unjustifiable recklessness in striking thus an unseen eavesdropper. Mark the contradiction between the attitude of mind which declines to kill the murderer of a father on the ground that he *may* go to heaven, and the recklessness which plunges a deadly weapon into an unseen listener on the supposition that he *may* be the king.

However, the killing of Polonius is not the only error committed by Hamlet in the interview. The ghost had given Hamlet this distinct order—

> "Nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven,
> And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
> To prick and sting her."

Is it obeying this command to paint to his mother with hideous distinctness the nature of her sin? Would it not have been enough to have killed the king, and without a word from Hamlet to let the queen learn that she had allowed herself to marry the murderer of her

husband? Was it quite a son's place to proclaim his mother's fault? Well may the ghost, with more pity for his erring wife than Hamlet for his mother, interpose to chide Hamlet's indecision, and to bespeak his pity for the queen.

> "Do not forget: this visitation
> Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
> But, look! amazement on thy mother sits:
> O, step between her and her fighting soul,—
> Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works,—
> Speak to her, Hamlet."

But if Hamlet is hesitating, the king is at work. Even before the play he has made up his mind that

> "Love! his affections do not that way tend;
> Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
> Was not like madness."

To Polonius the king may still keep up the belief in madness, but for himself he resolves to get Hamlet out of the way by sending him to England. This Hamlet has in some way learnt before his interview with the queen, and she confirms it.

In the next scene (Act iv. Scene 1) we find the queen assuring the king that Hamlet was mad, and imputing the death of Polonius to his brainish apprehension. To the queen as to Polonius the king keeps up the show of belief in Hamlet's insanity, but he takes his measures all the same. Meanwhile, lest any possible doubt of Hamlet's sanity should have arisen in the audience,

another scene between Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is introduced (Act iv. Scene 2). In this Hamlet not only gets the better, but calls attention to the absurdity of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's belief that they can explain his conduct by an illustration so subtle and ingenious that it would require not only a sane but an able man to have devised it.

Satisfied on this point, the audience are next called upon (Act iv. Scene 3) to witness an encounter between Hamlet and the king. It is a trial of strength between the two, for Hamlet knows that the king's excuse for sending him to England—namely, to secure him from the consequences of Polonius's death—is false. Here was another crisis in Hamlet's career. To go to England was to put himself out of the way of following up his revenge; but he goes, and the king's soliloquy lets the audience know that letters are to go with him which shall secure his instant execution on arrival on English soil. So far as mere human skill is concerned, the king has got the better of the game.

To impress even more strongly upon the audience Hamlet's mistake, he is made to proclaim his own failure. The sight of a band of Danish soldiers marching against the Poles rouses in him the same thoughts as were excited by the feigned passion of the player.

> "I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, *This thing's to do;*
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
> To do it."

Why, indeed? The man who has cause, will, strength, and means, is allowing himself to be hustled off to England, where, as the audience knows, a bloody death awaits him. It may, as Hamlet says, be a

"Craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event."

But if it is so, would it not be well for him to give a little thought to the inexorable law that chances once passed do not come again? Hamlet acts as if he had all eternity for his inheritance, while the audience are aware that, once on board for England, he is, humanly speaking, a lost man. Action, however, is the last thing Hamlet thinks of. To hurry back, to strike his sword into the murderer's breast, to appeal to Horatio, to the players, to the people, while the late events are fresh in their minds, would be the impulse of a man of action. Hamlet, however, draws a different conclusion.

"O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!"

Unfortunately the time of thought has passed, and the time for effective action is passing too.

Hamlet has gone to his death; but he is not the only sufferer from delay. Poor Ophelia—the innocent if weak Ophelia—has been driven distracted by the wholly needless death of her father (Act iv. Scene 5). "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions!" Indirectly, Hamlet is the cause of her madness, which affords a new proof to the audience of the disastrous course which he is now pursuing. Nor is

this all. Hamlet's conduct has called up an opponent. Laertes has come back from France, furious with anger at his father's death and his sister's misfortune. A false step of the king in not giving sufficient distinction to the ceremonial of Polonius's interment convinces Laertes that the king is responsible for his father's death; and thirsting for revenge, careless of proof, reckless of consequences, he rushes to the palace in search of immediate revenge. The eagerness of the rabble to follow a man who has not the slightest claim to the crown shows how easily Hamlet, the true heir, a man "loved of the distracted multitude," might have carried the country with him, had he had the courage to act decisively. In every respect Laertes's thought is wrong and Hamlet's is right. So long as it was a question of evidence, the heedlessness of Laertes emphasizes the wisdom of Hamlet's caution; but when we get to action the parts are reversed, and the decision and activity of Laertes, who was wrong, show up the hesitation and supineness of Hamlet, who was right.

Confronted with the new danger, the king shows to great advantage. He is a man of undoubted ability, and the Danes showed that they knew their own business when they accepted him as their king. The dignity of his behaviour contrasts well with the impetuosity and rudeness of Laertes. His reasonable suggestion that Laertes is acting so, that,

> "Sweepstake, he will draw both friend and foe,
> Winner and loser,"

carries conviction with it; and though the introduction of Ophelia in all the misery of her insanity might be expected to give a new stimulus to Laertes's ardour, he allows himself to be reasoned with, and to hear in private the king's explanation. The audience, however, being under the impression that Hamlet is on his way to death, a short scene (Act iv. Scene 6) is introduced to inform them, by means of a letter from Hamlet to Horatio, that by chance the king's design has failed, and that Hamlet has escaped and is now on his way to the court.

Meanwhile, the king (Act iv. Scene 7), reckoning upon Hamlet's death, throws upon him the guilt of Polonius's murder, and also declares to Laertes that Hamlet has devised a plot against the king's life; and indicates in general terms that he himself has taken the needful means to destroy Hamlet's power of danger. At this moment the startling intelligence is received that Hamlet is again in Denmark. For just one second the king is taken aback. "Can you," he says to Laertes, "advise me?" In another he has recovered himself, and devised a means to turn to account what seemed to be a failure. The king shows himself more alive than Hamlet to the duty of instantaneous revenge for the death of a father. "What would you undertake," he says to Laertes, "to show yourself your father's son in deed more than in words?" Nor is Laertes more backward. To revenge his father's death he would commit the most diabolical of crimes. "He would cut

the murderer's throat in the church." And the king continues in a speech which is an unconscious satire on Hamlet's action.

> "No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarise ;
> Revenge should have no bounds."

Hamlet's indecision has, however, convinced the king that he himself has comparatively little to fear ; and he therefore delays the action till he can arrange a fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet, in which Laertes, by the use of a bare unbuttoned foil, can, unsuspected, wreak his revenge. The plot is an admirable one, and carefully devised by Shakespeare not only to add a new crime to the king's account, but to remove from Laertes the sympathy of the audience. Hamlet, according to the ghost, is to "taint not his soul"; but Laertes unmistakably taints his when he suggests the smearing of a deadly poison on the rapier, "that, if I gall him slightly, it may be death." To make assurance doubly sure, the king will provide for Hamlet's refreshment a cup of poisoned drink.

> "Whereon but sipping,
> If he by chance escape your venomed stuck,
> Our purpose may hold there."

As if to recall the audience to the result of Hamlet's course, the drowning of Ophelia by accident is now announced, adding another to the list of accidental judgments which are following on his mistake.

Act v. Scene 1 introduces a new element. With

the murder of Polonius the comic element has been removed; but Shakespeare was well aware of the need for relief. The human mind cannot contemplate tragedy without intermission. The bow must occasionally be unstrung, and he provides the means of rest without detracting from the seriousness of the atmosphere in which the play is conceived. Hamlet is acting as if eternity were his: Shakespeare, in his gravediggers' scene, reminds us of the uncertainty of life. The last resting-place of Ophelia is being prepared, and so ordinary is the lot of humanity that the sextons joke over their accustomed labour. While thus at work they are approached by Hamlet and Horatio. So long as *thought* only is needed, Hamlet is more than sufficient. The reflections he offers on the uncertainty of life afford the best satire upon the use he is making of it. The funeral procession, shorn of its ceremony, approaches, and we learn what religion and charity have come to be in Denmark. The passionate extravagance of Laertes's grief calls up a sudden emulation in Hamlet himself, and an unseemly struggle follows, Hamlet showing exactly the same want of power to distinguish when action was or was not needed as he showed in the case of Polonius behind the arras. This scene shows Hamlet at his best and worst. Nothing can exceed the beauty of his reflections on the vicissitudes of humanity; nothing can exceed the want of control which allows him so to forget himself in the struggle with Laertes. It is just when the audience are most at a loss to decide whether

after all Hamlet is not, as the king and queen assert, mad, that further evidence of sanity is produced (Act v. Scene 2) in the narrative of his escape from the fatal stratagem of the king. It appears that on the voyage, while under the influence of an unaccountable impulse, he had opened the king's letters and found the order for his own death, of which the audience had even before his departure been aware. Confronted with the necessity for action, Hamlet is compelled to act at once, and again, as when he kills Polonius, he adopts the most reckless method. Just as he dashed his sword through the arras without waiting to know who was at the other side, he now deliberately sends his two old friends—who, for all he knows, may be as ignorant of the contents of the letter as he had been himself—to certain death. For this there is not the slightest necessity. A man of Hamlet's ability would have had no difficulty in composing letters of a mere formal character, and he could, while equally well securing his own return, have left it to the event to decide whether or no his schoolfellows were sharers in the plot against his life. This error did not spring "from thinking too precisely of the event"; it came from not thinking enough. The day after the opportune discovery of the letter a pirate attacks the Danish ship. In the confusion Hamlet escapes; he finds means to return to Denmark, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to their death.

Even Hamlet admits that the king's cup of iniquity is now full.

"He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
Popped in between the election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage,—is't not perfect conscience,
To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damned,
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?"

Brave words! But what do they mean? Must not they be taken as an attempt of Hamlet's to excuse to himself the delay which has occurred since he was first convinced of the king's guilt? "The canker of our nature" which has caused Polonius's death, Ophelia's madness, the deaths put on by cunning and forced cause, were to be imputed, not to the king's wickedness, but to Hamlet's own indecision; nor is Hamlet's next act that of a man who might be expected, now if ever,

"With wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love
To sweep to his revenge."

The appearance of Osric, the curled darling of the court who lisps the language of euphuism, diverts the revenger to his pet amusement of bandying words. Osric has come with a suggestion from the king that Hamlet and Laertes should have a bout with the foils. Hamlet accepts the challenge, and the man who should be burning with revenge agrees to indulge in a trivial pastime for the sport of the man whom every call of nature and self-preservation urge him to attack.

When the court appears, Hamlet, whose judgment in

a point of honour is unimpeachable, is all anxiety till he has offered Laertes a full apology for the share he has had in Polonius's death. He will not taint his soul; but Laertes is so reckless of his honour that even at the point of carrying into execution a dastardly trick he will declare

> "I do receive your offered love like love,
> And will not wrong it."

It is honour to which Laertes appeals, and this is the pass to which honour has come in Denmark. The fight begins. If Hamlet makes three hits before Laertes makes nine, he wins. Laertes allows Hamlet to make the first two hits. His mother, enthusiastic over her son's skill, takes up a cup to drink to his success. It is the poisoned cup. Then Laertes wounds Hamlet; then, in scuffling, they change rapiers, and Hamlet wounds Laertes. Alas! it is the poisoned rapier which has inflicted both wounds. The poisoned queen, the stabbed Laertes, proclaim the holocaust approaching. Laertes assures Hamlet that he has only half an hour of life. Then at last Hamlet acts. Time, on which he had counted, is no longer his. If he is to act at all, he must act at once, and plunging his rapier into the king's heart he at length has his revenge.

But what a revenge! It is true the king is dead, but his death reflects little credit upon Hamlet. Polonius cut off by a casual thrust; Ophelia bereft at once of sense and life and Christian burial; Rosencrantz

and Guildenstern sent to death, "not shriving time allowed"; the queen killed in her sin, and Laertes in his crime; Hamlet himself dying with blood upon his hands,—and every one of them sent to their doom,

> "Cut off even in the blossoms of their sin,
> Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled.
> No reckoning made, but sent to their account
> With all their imperfections on their heads,"

and all because Hamlet refused to kill the king at a moment when, with an extraordinary perversity, he fears to make his revenge imperfect by sending his father's murderer to heaven. What a commentary on "thinking too precisely on the event"!

Hamlet, therefore, can claim little credit for the punishment of his father's murderer. Had Claudius lived till Hamlet had satisfied himself that the right moment had come for the execution of vengeance, his life might, indeed, have been long. Hamlet's thoughts would doubtless have been bloody to the end of the chapter, but would he ever have translated them into deeds? Every hour that slipped by took from the value of the ghost's evidence and injured Hamlet's chance of convincing Denmark that his action was honourable. The more he delayed the more like treason would be his conduct, the greater would be the difficulty of securing credence for his story. More than that, he had to battle a man who was, as a conspirator, in every way his superior. The resources of Hamlet were nothing compared to those of the king. Is it likely

that, humanly speaking, Hamlet would come off victor in a match between the two?

The answer is "No"; but Shakespeare has provided for the contingency. The moral of his story is that "revenge will come"; and by decreasing to a minimum the part played by Hamlet in the catastrophe, he emphasizes the part played by an overruling providence. Denmark is utterly rotten. Her morality is exhibited in the actions of the queen and the thoughts of Ophelia; her statesmanship in Polonius; her religion in the ceremonious uncharitableness of her priests; her society in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. "The time is out of joint. O, cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right." In such a state of affairs, reform cannot come from within. The failure of Hamlet is of a piece with his surroundings. New blood is needed, and it is supplied by the election of Fortinbras of Norway, who with Horatio's aid is to set on foot a new era in Danish history.

In dealing with this play an attempt has been made to treat it from the objective rather than from the subjective point of view. It has been asked rather what did Hamlet do than why did he do it? But is not this the right method of approaching the study of Shakespeare? It is the same method as that which has unfolded the secrets of the natural world. A theory once formed, it is easy to interpret facts: the real difficulty is to make sure of the facts first and then to deduce the theory. Here we have first traced the steps by which

Hamlet's suspicions of his father's murder are roused, and shown the means by which he satisfied himself that his suspicions were well founded. Then was the moment for action. But Hamlet, for certain reasons, declines to act, and from that moment disasters innumerable fall upon him and upon all who are concerned in the event.

What were the qualities of mind which resulted in such a suspension of activity at the critical moment? It may be that "a lovely, pure, noble, and highly moral being, without the strength of mind that forms a hero, sinks beneath a load which it cannot bear and must not renounce. He views every duty as holy, but this one is too much for him. He is called upon to do what is impossible; not impossible in itself, but impossible to him. And as he turns and winds and torments himself, still advancing and retreating, ever reminded and remembering his purpose, he almost loses sight of it completely, without ever recovering his happiness." That is Goethe's solution in *Wilhelm Meister*.

Or shall we say as Coleridge says? "In Hamlet, Shakespeare seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of the balance between our attention to the object of our senses and our meditation on the working of our minds—an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed. His thoughts and the images of his fancy are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing

through the medium of his contemplations, acquire as they pass a form and colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great, an enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities."

Which of these views, or either, is right, is the Hamlet problem. In all probability its solution is unattainable in any form which will carry to every mind irresistible conviction. We have attempted a humbler task, viz. to realise what Hamlet did, which after all must supply the data upon which any criticism of *Hamlet* will depend.

JULIUS CÆSAR

Part I

In dealing with the assassination of Julius Cæsar, and the after-fate of the men who slew him, Shakespeare set before himself a harder task than that he had undertaken in the play of *Hamlet*. The subject was more foreign to English ideas; its appreciation demanded a clearer notion of political principles; there was on the surface of it less that appealed to humanity than there was in the fate of the young prince called upon to become the avenger of his father. Yet the title "Julius Cæsar" was in itself popular. The mighty Julius was a name which had fixed itself on the imagination of the world; the characters of Brutus and Cassius had in an age devoted to antique models been quoted again and again as examples of self-sacrifice for the sake of a noble though impracticable idea. The rehearsal of his murder was a subject in its more obvious outlines commonplace enough; but it was exactly the presentation of these which Shakespeare decided to minimise, while he threw his whole strength

into the delineation of the character of the murderers and their victim, and analysed with all the subtlety of his genius the causes of the failure of the great conspiracy.

The first thing to be done was to bring home to an English audience the most striking features of the Rome of Cæsar's day. This is effected in the first scene. It is a holiday. The workmen have deserted their workshops. The streets are decorated. The Roman world is on the tiptoe of expectation. To see what? To see and to rejoice in the entry of a Roman general who was returning from a signal victory over another officer who had been the most popular man of his time. The fickleness of the Roman mob, therefore, is the fact of Roman life which Shakespeare chose to put in the foreground.

> "Many a time and oft
> Have you climbed up to walls and battlements, . . .
> Your infants in your arms, and there have sat . . .
> To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.
> . . . . . .
> And do you now put on your best attire? . . .
> And do you now strew flowers in his way,
> That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?"

But though the mob—a word invented since Shakespeare's time—were ready enough to cheer Cæsar or Pompey with equal impartiality so long only as he who asked their cheers was the winner, there was a party in Rome who regarded the matter with very different eyes. This party is represented by the tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, and the introduction

of these officers is designed by Shakespeare to give the key to the political situation.

At the moment when the action of the play opens, the Roman world had for years been rent by a series of civil wars. Complicated as these are, it is possible to trace a leading idea. It is the contest between those who wished Rome to be governed in the interests of the old Roman families under the form of an oligarchical republic, and those who were wishful to see the Roman empire governed in the interests of everybody, Roman citizens and Roman subjects alike, and who were completely careless of republican forms so long as under a strong ruler they gained material prosperity. This struggle is not one which is peculiar to Rome. In one form or another it crops up again and again in all parts of the globe. So frequent has it been, that a name has been given to that form of rule which, under the guise of republican institutions, is really government by a single man. It is called democratic imperialism, and whether the man who carries it out is called Cæsar or Napoleon is a matter of indifference. The phenomenon is everywhere the same; it is that of a people, dissatisfied for some reason or another with republican government, handing to an individual full powers to secure for them immunity from civil strife, the danger of invasion, or the recovery of their they know not what, without inquiring too closely whether in grasping at an immediate object they are not surrendering something of more permanent value—the blessing of free

political life. Against such a fate, which is the great danger of republican or democratic communities, there is one safeguard and one only, the existence of strong political principle; and Shakespeare has with deadly accuracy placed his finger on the mark when he takes the fickleness of the Roman mob as the symptom that in Rome the basis of true republicanism had passed away. Everything was out of joint. The mob would cheer one faction leader as heartily as another; the representatives of the people, who bore the honoured name of tribune, are at variance with their nominal constituents. A victory over a Roman foe receives equal applause with one over a foreign enemy. Clearly, in such a nation as this, republicanism rests upon no solid basis; the Roman state is merely waiting for the arrival of its master.

Who the master is to be is next shown to us (Act i. Scene 2). It is Cæsar the successful general. His attendants already treat him with respectful deference. In a community as remarkable for simplicity of manners as the United States, he is already "my lord." When he speaks, every voice is silent. But though Shakespeare is most careful to lay stress upon the honour done to Cæsar, he is, for dramatic reasons, equally assiduous to prevent the personality of Cæsar from dominating the imagination of his audience. Cæsar, though his past has secured his position, hardly appears equal to his place. He is superstitious; he seems to be intoxicated with his triumph; he idealises his name; he believes

in his star. Nothing can be more true to nature. It is an exact description of what occurred in the case of Napoleon I. He, the most practical of men, the most careful in his combinations, the most observant of character, came like Cæsar to believe in luck, and to think that his star was sufficient to preserve him. Already there is a distinction between Cæsarism and Cæsar, as Napoleon in his later years was very different from Napoleonism. Having impressed this upon the mind of the audience, Shakespeare next brings forward the men who represent the opposite idea—Brutus and Cassius. Between them, Brutus and Cassius personify the two characteristics on which republicanism is everywhere based. Brutus's republicanism is political, Cassius's social. Brutus dislikes the very name of monarchy; he worships as sacred the republican form of government. That there should be good in any other form is to him inconceivable. Cassius, on the other hand, is social. He hates not monarchy, but kings. It is the tyrant and not his tyranny which rouses his feelings. He cannot brook to live under the shadow of a superior. Friends as the two are, there is between them a deep difference in this matter. Brutus never realises that Cassius's point of view is different from his own. Cassius is as incapable of attaining to the standpoint occupied by Brutus. Hence it is Cassius who makes the first advances. Passion is stronger than intellect; and while Brutus the doctrinaire is only moved to sadness by what he sees, Cassius's personal energy rouses him to active measures.

Brutus is too philosophical to be a practical politician. He does not feel called upon to meddle himself. Cassius, on the other hand, is a man of the world. He realises the value of Brutus's adhesion to his cause, and he strains every effort to bring his friend's philosophical dissatisfaction to a warmer temperature. Fortunately for Cassius, the arguments by which he tries to develop in Brutus the same personal hatred by which he was himself actuated are supported by sounds which appeal to Brutus far more than Cassius's arguments. For Cassius's view, taken by itself, is a distinctly low one. He applies to Cæsar physical tests. Cæsar has failed in an attempt to swim the Tiber; Cæsar has shown himself unable to bear the pains of sickness, therefore, thinks Cassius, there can be nothing in him. It vexes him beyond measure to see a man whose inferiority to himself in these matters is so plain pushed forward into a position of superiority. The mortification is none the less because Cassius was a man who plumed himself on control over the feelings, and to see a man less capable of this stoicism advanced beyond him was more than he could bear. To Brutus these arguments appeal much less; but as Cassius strives to rouse him, there came to his ear shout after shout, of a kind to be far more effective. The people are crowning Cæsar as king. Brutus's beloved republic is tottering. Moreover, there is a weak side in Brutus's character. He is the descendant of the man who drove out the kings, and an appeal not to fall short of his

ancestors finally determines him towards Cassius's plan.

Still it is Cassius who takes the lead, and it is he who endeavours to further work on Brutus by a graphic account of what had passed in the market-place. The man who gives this is Casca. Casca is the type of the aristocratic republican. No one could despise the mob more thoroughly than he. But his cynical contempt is not confined to the people. It is his pride to hate "humbug" of all kinds, whether it is in Cæsar or in the mob. Such a man is a mere tool in the hands of Cassius, while his genuine bravery and complete freedom from sentimentalism make him exactly the man for a conspirator. Him Cassius stops as he passes them, and asks him what has happened. Casca with a strange mixture of affected indifference and graphic narrative tells his tale: the gist of which is that Antony has made an offer of the crown, but that Cæsar, judging from the action of the mob that they still distrusted the title of king, has put the crown from him. Casca's narrative brings out two points—first, that it is in contemplation to make Cæsar king; and second, that Cæsar will be guided in his conduct by the wishes of the populace. This, Cassius thinks, is cause enough for his destruction. He sees too that Brutus is noble; but that though noble he has a weak point. His device is to play upon Brutus's pride of ancestry. Brutus could understand and defeat argument from a man of his own stamp, but he is

powerless against the wiles of a Cassius. This Cassius sees.

> "If I were Brutus now, and he were Cassius,
> He should not humour me."

Anonymous letters are to fan Brutus's family pride, and then Brutus's name once won,

> "Let Cæsar seat him sure;
> For we will shake him, or worse days endure."

In the next scene (Act i. Scene 3) Shakespeare begins to develop in his audience the sense of impending horror. To do so he takes Casca, the least imaginative and most cynical of men, and presents him stricken with amazement at the unnatural portents which confront him. Hitherto Casca has talked prose —always with Shakespeare the characteristic of the commonplace—but now his style is poetic. His whole attitude is changed. He the cynic rejects a rationalistic explanation of the portents in favour of the supernatural.

> "Let not men say
> 'These are their reasons, they are natural;'
> For I believe they are portentous things
> Unto the climate that they point upon."

In such a frame of mind he is only too ready to accept the explanation of Cassius, who rejoices in the storm as emblematic of the unnatural condition of the Roman world, and points the moral thus :—

"Now could I, Casca,
Name to thee a man most like this dreadful night;
. . . . . .
A man no mightier than thyself or me
In personal action, yet prodigious grown,
And fearful, as these strange eruptions are.

Casca. 'Tis Cæsar that you mean; is it not, Cassius?"

Cassius gives assent, and in doing so he gives the true key to the situation, though he fails to see it himself. His declaration that Cæsar is a tyrant, not from his own character but because the Romans are hinds, is absolutely true. It is the state ripe for tyranny which creates the tyrant. But that is not Cassius's own reading. He clearly thinks that the action of the few may counterbalance a tendency which springs from the character of the many, and that in a state which is ripe for no other form of government, to kill one tyrant is sufficient to exterminate tyranny. What is really wanted is not to destroy Cæsar but to change the character of the Romans. To do the first while the latter remains unchanged is worse than useless. That, however, Cassius is unable to see.

The conspiracy now makes rapid progress. Cassius is its Robert Catesby, Casca its Guy Fawkes; but it yet wants its Digby. That part is to be played by Brutus.

"O, he sits high in all the people's hearts:
And that which would appear offence in us,
His countenance, like richest alchemy,
Will change to virtue and to worthiness."

The means which Cassius takes to complete the enlistment of Brutus do not give us a very high opinion of that statesman. To be moved to undertake so serious an enterprise by a series of anonymous letters hardly strikes one as consistent with great steadiness of character. Such, however, are Cassius's means, and in Act ii. Scene 1 we learn that they have proved to be completely successful.

We now enter upon one of the most important sections of the play—the explanation of how it was that Brutus reconciled to his conscience the murder of his friend. To Cassius, who was actuated by envy, the murder of the object of his hatred was natural enough, and in him there is no trace of hesitation; but with Brutus it was not so. Not only did the action itself revolt him, but he required to be able to present to his conscience something like a logical argument which should justify the deed. Brutus does not err from obtuseness. No circumstance which would heighten the enormity of the act is absent from his mind. Personal cause of hatred he has none. General causes alone have force to move him. These, however, are wanting. That Cæsar is powerful is not in itself a crime. It is not the use of power but the abuse of it which is dangerous, and Brutus freely admits that he knows no man so unlikely to abuse his opportunities as Cæsar. Neither what he has done, nor what he is, therefore, is sufficient to warrant the murder, and Brutus is forced to fall back for support upon a purely

hypothetical case. Cæsar must fall, not for what he is or for what he has done, but for what he may do.

> "And, since the quarrel
> Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
> Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
> Would run to these and these extremities:
> And, therefore, think him as a serpent's egg
> Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
> And kill him in the shell."

But surely it is not moral to kill a man, not for what he has done, but for what he may do; it can only be justified in the extreme case where his intentions admit of no dispute, and can only be anticipated by instant action. To murder a good man because he may chance to turn out bad is defensible under no code of morals whatever. This is Brutus's first mistake. He has allowed himself to be drawn by the artful Cassius to take part in a plot which even his most sophistical reasoning can hardly reconcile with his conscience. He then goes on to show that, in undertaking to act the part of a conspirator at all, he has grossly overrated his own capacity. Cassius gives him no time to go back from his resolution. It has hardly been formed when he finds himself surrounded by the conspirators, and taking upon himself the *rôle* of leader. But he plays the part ill. It was part of the price paid by Cassius for the advantage of Brutus's countenance that in the practical management of the conspiracy he was compelled to defer his own judgment of what was best to the less

sagacious notions of his philosophical leader, and in every point where the views of Brutus and Cassius are in conflict, Cassius is invariably right and Brutus as invariably wrong.

The first point of difference is in the matter of the oath with which Cassius wishes to bind together the band of conspirators. Brutus will have none of it. He argues from his own case and thinks that all are like himself. It is tyranny not tyrants that he hates, and he assumes that every one else can be as constant to an idea as he believes himself to be. Next arises the question of Cicero. That orator was in his way as valuable a man as Brutus. He had already done the republic an immense service by putting down the conspiracy of Catiline; he was the most persuasive orator of his time; he carried with him the respectability of a long life passed in the service of his country. To secure his countenance would in Cassius's mind be invaluable. But Brutus with his absolute manner declines even to allow Cicero to be sounded.

> "O, name him not; let us not break with him;
> For he will never follow anything
> That other men begin."

Here Brutus was wrong, and at the critical moment when Cicero's eloquence would have been of the utmost value to the conspirators, he was not among them. The next error is even more disastrous. Cassius urges that Mark Antony, Cæsar's right hand man, should fall with

his master. But Brutus again dissents for reasons which from a conspirator are as fantastic as those which made Hamlet decline to slay Claudius at his prayers. The French have a proverb that "we cannot make omelets without breaking eggs," and Brutus's attempt to carry out an immoral conspiracy upon moral principles is simply ludicrous. In such a case "he who wishes the end wishes the means," and nothing but a stern determination to let no scruples stand in his way could possibly have carried Brutus's project to success. In his view of Antony, Brutus shows himself utterly wanting in the power of reading character. He does not recognise Antony's capacity for initiative; he persists in regarding him as a mere limb, incapable of separate action. Still more mistaken is his view of the meaning of the conspiracy.

> "We all stand up against the spirit of Cæsar:
> And in the spirit of men there is no blood:
> O, that we then could come by Cæsar's spirit,
> And not dismember Cæsar!"

Even if we set aside the fact that Brutus is the only one of the conspirators who thinks of Cæsarism at all as distinguished from Cæsar, nothing can be more absurd than to regard the conspiracy as a blow at Cæsarism. Cæsar's spirit is the spirit of the times. It shows itself in the mob which cheers alike Cæsar and Pompey; it is recognised by Cassius in the effeminate character of the Romans fit only for slavery. Cæsar is the accident, Cæsarism is the reality, and so far from

not being able to strike Cæsarism without striking Cæsar, it is impossible by striking Cæsar to touch Cæsarism at all. This, however, is utterly hidden from the eyes of Brutus, and nothing can show it more completely than the circumstance that while they make every disposition for carrying out the murder of Cæsar, the problem what to do after he has been murdered never even presents itself to their minds. They seem to think that, Cæsar gone, things will go on as before. He only is the danger to the republic. But this is not politically true. It is the same mistake which shows itself in the idea that if Cromwell, Hampden, and Pym had died in their infancy, Charles I. would have died in his bed; and believes that had a chance bullet terminated Bonaparte's career at the siege of Toulon, the French republic would never have developed into a military despotism. Causes are stronger than men. Leaders are always to be found, and Shakespeare knew well what he was about when he showed his countrymen how to distinguish between the man who appears to be the cause of a movement, and the movement which is in reality the cause of him.

To resume the study of the play. Brutus's next action is to impart the plot to his wife Portia. This lady is Brutus's counterpart. Altogether womanly in her care and watchfulness over her husband; but wishing as Cato's daughter and as Brutus's wife to share his political plans. In doing this she overrated her strength. She confounds her power to bear physical pain with her

power of moral constancy. In this she makes the same mistake as Cassius, who, arguing in an opposite sense, could not understand how a man like Cæsar, who was deficient in physical force and in the ability to bear the pangs of disease, could have in him the capacity to be the foremost man in all the world. In this way Portia deceives both herself and her husband, and makes the same error that he did when, overrating his strength, he allowed himself to be forced by Cassius into the position of leader of the conspiracy.

On the general question whether women have any business in conspiracies, Shakespeare has given two answers. Lady Macbeth, we all know, joins her husband; but Harry Hotspur keeps his Kate outside.

"*Kate.* Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
And I must know it, else he loves me not.

. . . . .

Hotspur. I know you wise, but yet no further wise
Than Harry Percy's wife: constant you are;
But yet a woman: and for secrecy,
No lady closer; for I well believe
Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.
And so far will I trust thee, gentle Kate."

And perhaps Hotspur showed himself in this the wiser man of the two.

We now return to Cæsar (Act ii. Scene 2). The handling of Cæsar's character was a most delicate task. If made too great, he would overshadow the conspirators and attract too much sympathy for himself; if too little, his character would be inconsistent with the position he

had won. With rare genius Shakespeare solves the difficulty. Cæsar was a man of action. It was at the head of armies that he had triumphed. But it did not follow that in a position where action was impossible he would show to equal advantage. It is the waiting game that tries the active man. Cæsar's position in Rome was anomalous to him. He the great general has no soldiers at his back. He is a civilian among civilians. Moreover, there was no obvious step for him to take. He had for a moment lost the initiative. The plan of Antony's presentation of the crown at the Lupercal had turned out a failure, and there was nothing to be done but to wait the further development of events. It was natural enough, therefore, that Cæsar should be somewhat at a stand, and that doomed to play the part of an inactive waiter upon events, he should have appeared to disadvantage beside conspirators who were fortunate enough in having an opportunity for activity. This appears to be the best explanation of Cæsar's hesitation. If there were anything to be done, he would do it; but at a time when by the necessity of the case it lay with the people to take the initiative, he who is the embodiment of the idea of everything for the people and nothing by the people is naturally at a loss.

This it is which makes Cæsar play such a poor figure when confronted with Calpurnia's dreams (Act ii. Scene 2). He is not afraid. What he says of the fear of death is the utterance of a brave man; but he is

nervous about appearances, and it is this which makes him fall a victim to the flatteries of Decius Brutus. But when once Cæsar has taken his road to the Capitol, Shakespeare's purpose changes. He wishes in the final moment to lay stress upon the true grandeur of the man whom the conspirators were so lightly to slay, and every act and word of Cæsar is designed to make his character contrast with the meanness of the ruck of the conspirators.

Cæsar will not die without warning. Brutus's folly in not securing secrecy by an oath has resulted in the conspiracy being known. Artemidorus, a teacher of rhetoric, has heard of it (Act ii. Scene 3). His name shows him to have been a Greek, and as a provincial he was in favour of Cæsar. From his mouth we learn for the first time the common-sense view of the conspiracy. Private hate and jealousy of virtue are to his mind its mainspring.

> "My heart laments that virtue cannot live
> Out of the teeth of emulation."

Nothing but the magnanimity of Cæsar, who declines to allow his private business to have the preference, defeats Artemidorus's friendly design to warn him of his danger (Act iii. Scene 1). Nor is chance less friendly to the conspirators in the matter of Portia. Nothing shows more plainly how Brutus mistook his wife's powers than her action while the conspiracy is going forward (Act ii. Scene 4). Her nervousness and excitability are

extreme. It is no credit to her that her conduct fails to arouse suspicion.

The movement of the plot is now rapid. The conspirators press round Cæsar. Their plan is to separate him from his friends. One of them draws Antony aside; another presents a petition; a third supports it. But Cæsar is firm. He will do nothing unconstitutional. The banishment of Metellus Cimber was the punishment due to his crime; Cæsar's vote for it had not been given without due consideration, and it was not the part of an honest ruler to alter his mind because a criminal found men to fawn for him. But his very constancy gives the last spice of gall to the conspirators, and at the moment of his marked refusal they stab him.

Such was the consummation of the conspiracy. The assassins had dismembered Cæsar's body: though it had cost Brutus many a pang to do so. The question now was whether they would be able to justify their action by its success. Had Cæsar died in vain? Would the Roman world, corrupt and fickle before, be purified and steadied by his death? Would a people ripe for tyranny be made worthy of freedom by the death of a single tyrant? That is the question, and it is abundantly answered in the sequel.

Part II

The climax of the play is reached in the assassination of Cæsar. It is followed by a moment of suspense.

What will the conspirators do now? is the question which rises in the mind of every reader. Oddly enough, however, the conspirators themselves have never formulated the inquiry, and when the moment for action comes they are lost in hesitation. Such is ever the way with conspirators. They fix their gaze on a particular point to be attained, the murder of a sovereign, the blowing up of a parliament, the kidnapping of a prince, but rarely indeed do they realise sufficiently that such a deed can only be the opening of a drama, and that it will be by their subsequent action that their real value as politicians will be tried. It is a remarkable fact that in the celebrated conspiracy of the Pazzi at Florence an exactly similar thing happened. A body of young men, fired by the example of this very Brutus and Cassius, formed a plan to murder the brothers Medici, who were beginning to play at Florence much the same part that Cæsar had done at Rome. The younger fell dead, the elder seriously wounded. But their victims down, the conspirators were at a stand; they had assumed that the people would join them in a frenzy of enthusiasm for liberty. But the people would have none of them. Some were killed on the spot and some were executed, and the rule of the Medici was established more firmly than before.[1]

[1] "He endeavoured to assemble adherents by cries of 'People' and Liberty'; but the former had been rendered deaf by the fortune and liberality of the Medici, the other was unknown."—Machiavelli, *History of Florence*, p. 361 (Bohn's Edition).

So it was at Rome. Cæsar down, a moment of panic follows (Act iii. Scene 1). The frantic shouts of Liberty and Freedom with which the conspirators announce their success find no response among the terrified groups of senators who are flying for their lives. Even at this very moment the republican Cassius fears that the rage of the people may be turned upon their would-be deliverers. For a space indeed Brutus and Cassius are allowed to enjoy their triumph; for a second or two they may bathe their hands in Cæsar's blood, and even look forward to a glorious inheritance of fame. But only for a moment. The entry of a servant recalls them to the realities of life, and brings into full contrast the excess of their enthusiasm and the deficiency of their political ability.

Enter a servant. He is the bearer of a message from Antony, the man whom Brutus had declared

> "Could do no more than Cæsar's arm
> When Cæsar's head is off."

In this, however, Brutus has been completely mistaken. Cæsar gone, Antony takes his place, and as the moment has come for action, he shows exactly the ability which Cæsar himself would have shown in the same situation. His first idea is to ascertain his exact position with regard to the conspirators. That the slaughter should stay with Cæsar must to a Roman of the time have seemed all but incredible, and it gives at once Antony's measure of Brutus's character that he believed him

capable of so un-Machiavelian a policy. Accordingly, he sends through the servant a flattering speech. Ignoring the rest of the conspirators, he places Brutus in opposition to Cæsar, and playing upon Brutus's known addiction to logic, declares his willingness to follow Brutus.

> "If Brutus will vouchsafe that Antony
> May safely come to him, and be resolved
> How Cæsar hath deserved to lie in death."

Brutus unhesitatingly falls into the trap. The demand for *reasons* convinces him of Antony's wisdom. He sees in it just the absence of passion that delights him, and he says—

> "Tell him, so please him come unto this place,
> He shall be satisfied, and, by my honour,
> Depart untouched."

"I know that we shall have him well to friend," is Brutus's complacent comment upon the interview. Cassius, who would have had Antony killed, is less satisfied.

> "I wish we may; but yet have I a mind
> That fears him much; and my misgiving still
> Falls shrewdly to the purpose."

Antony, however, is far too acute to give Brutus time to reflect. No sooner is his safety assured by the conspirators than he is among them. A moment he hangs over the corpse of Cæsar, the next he is hard

at work among the conspirators. Do they mean to kill him? If so, no moment is so fit as the present and no weapons so suitable as those which are reeking with Cæsar's blood. On this point he is at once assured by Brutus.

> "For your part,
> To you our swords have leaden points, Mark Antony;
> Our arms in strength of malice, and our hearts
> Of brothers' temper, do receive you in
> With all kind love, good thoughts, and reverence."

The offer is all on Brutus's side; he is giving himself away without a price, but indeed, except the safe-conduct, he offers Antony nothing. It is the worldly Cassius who remarks—

> "Your voice shall be as strong as any man's
> In the disposing of new dignities."

Brutus does not even give Antony the reasons on receiving which Antony had based his promise of support. Only after the people have been appeased is Antony to have

> "The cause,
> Why I, that did love Cæsar when I struck him,
> Have thus proceeded."

It is now that Antony proceeds to the basest act of flattery of which he is guilty. In turn he grasps the bloody hand of each of his friend's murderers. He anticipates the obvious suspicion that his conduct should provoke by his assertion —:

> "My credit now stands on such slippery ground,
> That one of two bad ways you must conceit me,
> Either a coward or a flatterer."

To lull still further the suspicion of the conspirators, he apologises, as it were, to Cæsar's corpse for making so hasty an alliance with them. As ever, Cassius alone is suspicious. He was too much a man of the world not to suspect the unctuous style of Antony's panegyric, and he hastily breaks in with

> "I blame you not for praising Cæsar so;
> But what compact mean you to have with us?
> Will you be pricked in number of our friends;
> Or shall we on, and not depend on you?"

Cassius, in fact, would like something more precise, but Antony will not give it. He merely repeats his former asseveration—

> "Friends am I with you all, and love you all;
> Upon this hope, that you shall give me reasons
> Why and wherein Cæsar was dangerous."

Exactly, and Antony was orator enough to put the reservation last where he did not wish it to be noticed, instead of first as he did in his own mind. Brutus, confident in his reasons, again assents, and then Antony casually introduces his postscript—

> "That's all I seek;
> And am, moreover, suitor that I may
> Produce his body to the market-place;
> And in the pulpit, as becomes a friend,
> Speak in the order of his funeral."

Again Brutus consents. Cassius, as usual, protests; but Brutus's overweening belief in reason again silences the objection. Brutus will speak first and "show the reason of our Cæsar's death"; he will mention that Antony's speech is made but by permission. Here we have at once the root of Brutus's error. He believes that reason and not passion sways the multitude. Antony well knows the opposite. He feels within himself the power to speak; he knows that once he can get the ear of the multitude he can soon efface any impression that Brutus may have made. Cassius, as usual, mutters the truth in unheeding ears, and Brutus and the others pass out to *give the reasons*, which Brutus at any rate never doubts will be conclusive.

Meanwhile Antony is left alone with Cæsar's corpse. Then his true character is betrayed. He curses the murderers whose hands he has just grasped. He prophesies that disaster shall come on Italy for this day's work; famine, sword, and fire shall possess the land which has shown itself unworthy of "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times." He is interrupted by a servant, and we learn not only that Cæsar's family is not extinct, but that a new Cæsar is at hand. He, Antony says, must await the event; and in full confidence of his powers of oratory, he tells the man to

> Stay awhile
> ". . . till I have borne this corse
> Into the market-place; there shall I try,
> In my oration, how the people take

> The cruel issue of these bloody men;
> According to the which, thou shalt discourse
> To young Octavius of the state of things."

Meanwhile Brutus has set out on his reason-giving errand (Act iii. Scene 2). He has not a very favourable audience to address. "We will be satisfied; let us be satisfied," are not exactly encouraging sounds to greet his ear. Cassius will speak to one crowd, Brutus to another. Of Cassius's speech we hear nothing, but we can imagine that the stern republican who hated tyrants would have some difficulty in speaking without letting it be evident that envy of great Cæsar played a very prominent part in his mind. Brutus's speech, however, Shakespeare gives in full, and it is a perfect reflex of Brutus's character.

In form it is the speech of a student, and no one makes a worse popular orator than the man who has lived in a study. In manner it is a precise reproduction of the euphuistic style of Shakespeare's own day, the language which was used by the literary pedants of the time. Each sentence is accurately balanced. "Hear me for my cause; and be silent, that you may hear: believe me for mine honour; and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe." Is that the sort of language for Hyde Park or Trafalgar Square? And the matter is worse. It is a series of subtle distinctions utterly unknown to the workaday world. "As Cæsar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I

honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him." The questions he puts are simply puzzling. "Who is here so base that would be a bondman?" Is any one likely to hold up a hand for that? "Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman?" No answer. "Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply." "None, Brutus, none." "Then none have I offended." But does it follow? Can no one but bondmen, traitors, and villains be offended by the death of "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times"? Logically, Brutus is begging the question; and so far from having really convinced the crowd, he has merely puzzled them. Their shouts show the futility of his speech. He believes himself to have proved to them that Cæsar's death was the proper punishment for having aimed at absolutism. The deduction drawn by the crowd is that Brutus wishes to be Cæsar. "Live, Brutus." "Let him be Cæsar." "Cæsar's better parts shall be crowned in Brutus." These are hardly the words of republicans. Brutus himself is bewildered by their sound. He begins to depart alone, and enjoins the crowd to listen to Antony's oration.

Antony's turn has come, but he has a severe task before him. The murmurs of the mob acquaint him with their devotion to their new Cæsar, Brutus. "Cæsar was a tyrant, and they are blest that Rome is rid of him"; but Brutus—"'Twere best he speak no harm of Brutus here." Nothing can be more judicious

than Antony's opening. "I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him," is calculated to divert attention from the real meaning of his speech. Cæsar's evil deeds will be remembered, his good are passed with his life. To bury him is all that is left, even for his friends. He then turns aside to appeal to their pity.

> "The noble Brutus
> Hath told you that Cæsar was ambitious:
> If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
> And grievously hath Cæsar answered it."

But while repeating Brutus's assertion he sets over against it three small facts—not assertions, not logical deductions, but facts.

(*a*) "He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious?

(*b*) When that the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:

(*c*) You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?"

Again he repeats that he is not trying to disprove what Brutus has said: and then with the art of a true orator he pauses a moment to let his facts, not words, sink into the minds of his hearers.

The conversation which follows between the citizens shows the effects of his speech. "Methinks there is much

reason in his sayings." What a satire upon Brutus's speech, whose remarks would simply be classed as assertions! "If thou consider rightly of the matter, Cæsar has had great wrong." This from the citizen who a moment before was for giving Brutus a statue. "I fear there will a worse come in his place." This from the man who was for making Brutus Cæsar. "Marked ye his words? He would not take the crown; therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious." A dram of fact is worth a pound of abstraction, and Antony knows well that he must use concrete arguments with unskilled minds.

Gratified with what he hears, Antony takes up a bolder line. He now aims at rousing the personal indignation of the citizens, not at Brutus and Cassius as the murderers of Cæsar, but at Brutus and Cassius as men who have wronged the citizens themselves. He pits the conspirators against the citizens.

> "I will not do them wrong; I rather choose
> To wrong the dead, to wrong *myself* and *you*,
> Than I will wrong such honourable men."

That is much more to the point than Brutus's abstractions. Nor does he lack arguments to show with whom, with Cæsar or his murderers, their sympathies should lie. It is the old story of "Codlin's your friend, not Short," and rarely has Codlin found a better advocate.

> "But here's a parchment with the seal of Cæsar;
> I found it in his closet, 'tis his will:

Let but the commons hear this testament—
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read—
And they would go and kiss dead Cæsar's wounds
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood,
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue."

This is an appeal to passion, not to reason, and it has an instantaneous effect. The citizens shout for the will with an enthusiasm they never displayed before. So energetic are they that Antony has to check them. But he does so in such a way as only to excite their curiosity the more.

"It is not meet you know how Cæsar loved you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And, being men, hearing the will of Cæsar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad:
'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;
For, if you should, O, what would come of it."

The citizens are now thorough Cæsarians, so Antony ventures to allude again to "the honourable men," and we may be sure he put a little sarcasm into the phrase, "whose daggers have stabbed Cæsar." It is not Antony but the citizens who define their new view of Brutus and Cassius.

"They were traitors: honourable men!
. . . . . .
They were villains, murderers: the will! read the will!"

But Antony has something to do with them before he reads the will. He wishes to impress upon his hearers the cruelty of the conspirators, and he does so graphically, recalling to their minds the exact details of the assassination, which, we must remember, was done in the senate-house and not before the public. The details, therefore, were to the citizens new. They were merely aware of the death; of the manner of the slaying they knew nothing. A ring is formed around the body, and then Antony holding Cæsar's blood-stained mantle in his hand, continued his address.

The mantle itself recalled the name of one of Cæsar's greatest victories, his Waterloo or Austerlitz. Then it was new, now it is hacked to ribbons by the daggers of his assailants.

> "See what a rent the envious Casca made:
> Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed."

And following up the mention of Brutus he harps upon the ingratitude of the man. Then comes the culminating appeal—

> "O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!
> Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
> Whilst bloody treason flourished over us."

Again a pause while they gaze upon the marred visage of the man whose fortunes they now identify with their own. The pause over, Antony aims another shaft at the conspirators.

"What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,
That made them do it: they are wise and honourable,
And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you."

Determined to add greater weight to his reasons by divesting them of any glamour they may have had from his oratory, he expressly disclaims such power for himself, while he cruelly emphasizes the weakness of Brutus's appeal by insinuating that what he has said had been clothed with all the art of the orator.

"I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
That love my friend; and that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him:
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
To stir men's blood: I only speak right on;
I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
Show you sweet Cæsar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me; but were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Cæsar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny."

So complete is Antony's success that he is in danger of overreaching himself. The will has not been read, and that omitted, Antony is aware that a most potent incentive to fidelity will be wanting. He recalls the mutineers to tell them that by Cæsar's will each of them is the owner of seventy-five drachmas.

> "Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
> His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,
> On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
> And to your heirs for ever; common pleasures,
> To walk abroad and recreate yourselves."

The money and the park are things the citizens can understand better than the "Peace, Freedom, and Liberty" with which Brutus claimed to have endowed them. It will go hard with Brutus and Cassius now if they fall into the hands of the mob. Indeed so it does with one who was not even a conspirator. Poor Cinna, the poet, had in a sort of feylike mood wandered aimlessly to the street. There he is set on by the mob and torn to pieces merely because, his name being Cinna, they chose to confound him with the conspirator. That is how what Victor Hugo used to call the great heart of the people does its justice in Rome.

A long gap now intervenes before the events related in Act iv. Scene 1, but when we take up the story again there is not very much difference between the scenes. The last showed us the Roman mob killing Cinna in pure wantonness, the next displays the new leaders of the Roman world bargaining away the lives of their nearest relations. In truth, in such a place as Rome mob law and tyrant law are much alike. The new tyrants are Antony, Octavius Cæsar, and Lepidus. One of the citizens had with fatal prescience said of the murdered Cæsar, "I fear there will a worse come in his place." And is it not true? Instead of the man of whom

Brutus had said that "his affections never swayed more than his reason," we have three cold-blooded tyrants, who murder their friends and relations, mutilate Cæsar's will, and cannot even keep faith among one another. These are the men whom Brutus and Cassius have given as an exchange for Cæsar. Yet they are men of political and military capacity, who know the need of union and of energy in their cause, and are taking the right means, immoral though they may be, to secure their ends.

And what of Brutus and Cassius? At the first sound of Antony's success Shakespeare makes them ride like mad men through the streets of Rome, and now (Act iv. Scene 2), having levied great powers, they are about to do battle against the three Cæsarians. Very different, however, is their military capacity. Brutus and Cassius exhibit the same characteristics as soldiers that they had done as conspirators. In their counsels Brutus exercises an unhappy influence. "Stiff in opinion, always in the wrong," he yet contrives to out-argue the more practical Cassius. This ascendency he owes to Cassius's admiration for Brutus's almost superhuman power of self-control. Cassius has grown more peevish as time went on. A terrible sense of the inevitable has stolen away his hope. But Brutus is as stoical as ever. In Act iv. Scene 3 he bears Cassius's reproaches—and we cannot help feeling that from the point of view of policy it was Cassius who was right—with marvellous fortitude, and when Cassius discovers that this exhibition of patience has occurred

at the moment when Brutus was hiding in his bosom the news of Portia's death, his admiration completely disarms his resentment.

> "I have as much of this in art as you,
> But yet my nature could not bear it so."

As time wears on, Cassius's nature seems to harden, it is the Roman within him that comes more and more to the front; but with Brutus it is otherwise. He becomes more lovable than he was. A touch of tenderness comes over his character which brings into clearer contrast the mask of stoicism which he wore. His delicate and thoughtful care for his little page-boy and his guards are designed to bring out this trait, and to place in stronger relief the real inconsistency of the man who, tender as he was, could be persuaded by political sophistry to plunge his dagger to the hilt in the heart of his dearest friend. An atmosphere of absolute hopelessness lowers over the republican camp. The appearance to Brutus of his evil spirit is but on a par with the surroundings. Even the eagles which for a time perched on the standards gave place to carrion-crows and kites as the day of battle approached. It is a fight against the inevitable.

Arrived at Philippi, mistake and misfortune still go hand in hand. An interview (Act v. Scene 1) forced on by Brutus between the leaders only leads to Brutus's hearing for the first time the common-sense view of the murder. As Antony puts it:—

"Villains, you did not so, when your vile daggers
Hacked one another in the sides of Cæsar:
You showed your teeth like apes, and fawned like hounds,
And bowed like bondmen, kissing Cæsar's feet;
While damned Casca, like a cur, behind,
Struck Cæsar on the neck. O you flatterers!"

In the battle itself, as if to show that fate, not skill, was fighting against them, Cassius, the better soldier, is beaten (Act v. Scene 3), while Brutus, the philosopher, is successful; but to render even this success fatal, Cassius in mistake commits suicide, and in a second contest (Act v. Scene 4) Brutus himself is defeated, and dies by his own hand (Scene 5). Even in death the feeling of a lost cause is uppermost in their minds. Cassius's last words, "Cæsar, thou art revenged, even with the sword that killed thee," and Brutus's, "Cæsar, now be still; I killed not thee with half so good a will," tell the same story of hopeless failure. It is this which gives its pathetic air to the close of the play. Brutus and Cassius, the two leaders, are alone. Casca, Trebonius, Decius, Cimber, never reappear after the murder; as if Shakespeare wished to purge away all the coarser parts from the conspiracy, and to display to us its best elements as those on which the final punishment fell. For Cassius and Brutus are in their ends noble. Like Romans, they die without repining. Mistaken as they are, they are greater than Antony, the time-serving politician. The beauty of Brutus's character increases even to the last. He was at his worst when he decided to slay Cæsar. During and after the conspiracy,

even his mistakes serve to illustrate the nobleness of his character. As a politician he was a failure. As a soldier he cannot compare with either Antony or Cassius. But simply as a man, no one can fail to recognise the beauty of the character which the old republican world of Rome had brought forth. Though despised by them as a practical politician, both Antony and Cassius amply recognise his merits as a man, and we feel the appropriateness of the politician and soldier who had foiled him being chosen to pronounce his panegyric.

> "This was the noblest Roman of them all:
> All the conspirators, save only he,
> Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar;
> He only, in a general honest thought
> And common good to all, made one of them.
> His life was gentle, and the elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, 'This was a man.'"

If we may venture to ask what was the political idea which runs through *Julius Cæsar*, I confess it seems somewhat pessimistic, though in Shakespeare's time it was not a bad moral to preach, and there were those among Shakespeare's friends to whom a lesson in the uselessness of conspiracies might not be without its value. It is this: "Every nation has as good a government as it deserves." If the nation is sound, so will be its rulers; if corrupt, then corruption will bear sway. The murder of one ruler will merely change the person;

infallibly it will not better the character of the ruled. It is only by changing the character of the rank and file of the nation that any improvement can be effected in its political institutions. In his days this was no barren lesson for England. The rule of the last of the Tudors and the first of the Stuarts might not be all that was ideal, but it was not by Essex conspiracies, Main and Bye plots, or the horrible designs of Catesby, Digby, and Fawkes, that it could be ameliorated. The men who were the real reformers of his day were the Puritan preachers, who were training up the generation which curbed the royal power, and set on foot the movement which within a century made England the freest, most enlightened, and most tolerant country in Europe and in the world.

MACBETH

Part I

What is the impression which Shakespeare, in the first scene, wishes to make upon his audience? In *Hamlet* it was a feeling of insecurity, in *Julius Cæsar* the fickleness of the Roman mob, here it is probably the presence of the supernatural. Shakespeare calls upon us to prepare for a plot in which the supernatural is to supply the motive force, and in which the leading character, Macbeth, is to be the *protégé* of an unseen world of violence.

Scene 2, on the other hand, gives us the characteristics of mundane Scotland. These are violence and treachery. Macdonwald's open insurrection, Cawdor's secret treachery, the Norwegian invasion, give us in a couple of pages the life of Scotland of Macbeth's day; and the first question of the audience is, "Who is the king of such a distracted country?" Shakespeare is ready with his answer. It is the gentle Duncan, whose function in a struggle which had like to have cost his

throne is simply to receive reports from his soldiers of the progress of the fight. Such a man, like Henry VI of England, might have every virtue of private life, but he could never be a real king ; and every speech he utters serves to bring him into clearer contrast with Macbeth, "Bellona's bridegroom lapped in proof," the hero of the hour, the deliverer of Scotland and of Scotland's king.

Here Shakespeare calls upon us to witness another presentation of the witches (Act i. Scene 3). From the supernatural to violence, from violence to the supernatural, that is the rule in Scotland ; and by the second appearance of the weird sisters, we are prepared to accept their incantations as the motive forces of life. The prophecy, then, of the witches,

> "All hail, Macbeth ! hail to thee, thane of Glamis !
> All hail, Macbeth ! hail to thee, thane of Cawdor !
> All hail, Macbeth ! thou shalt be king hereafter,"

strikes us as in the highest degree natural. That he is Glamis we know, that Duncan has already named him for Cawdor's place we are aware, that in the turn of fate the man most fitted to be king of Scotland should reign is so reasonable that we feel no repugnance to a prophecy so much in accord with our own feelings of what is fit ; only in the witches' answer to Banquo,

> "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.
> Not so happy, yet much happier.
> Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none,"

is there matter for speculation and curiosity. Hardly

have the witches vanished when the fulfilment of their prophecy begins, for Macbeth is saluted by the king's messengers by the title of thane of Cawdor. On Macbeth the effect of this news is instantaneous. It is accepted by him as proof almost positive of the truth of the whole prophecy, and his first impulse is to test Banquo to see if he interprets the prophecy in the same sense. Not so the matter-of-fact and loyal Banquo. To him the partial fulfilment of the witches' forecast only suggests the common trick of the card-sharper, who permits his victim to win the first game only in order to lure him more effectually to ruin. The warning, however, is lost on Macbeth, and he becomes so wrapt in the contemplation of the future that he loses all consciousness of the world around him. His thoughts have hurried at once to the means whereby the prophecy is to be made good. Murder, and murder only, strikes him as the step by which he must mount the throne, and the first idea of such an action is distinctly horrible to him.

Confronted with murder, therefore, Macbeth draws back. It occurs to him that chance may bring about that which now seems impossible. "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, without my stir," and his next impulse is to leave the matter to chance. At any rate, he will see what Banquo thinks of it before he goes farther.

We now leave Macbeth (Act i. Scene 4) and return to Duncan. We find him in the act of inquiring the

fate of Cawdor. That nobleman's death shows him to have been a man of the profoundest self-control, of whose inner thoughts his features give no sign; and he represents another danger which besets the peaceful king. On the one hand, he had to dread the open violence of the rebel against whom only a warrior could hold his own; on the other, the subtle arts of the traitor only to be foiled by craft as subtle. In such straits the innocent Duncan is almost as helpless as a child. He feels sorely his inability to cope with subtlety.

> "There's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face:
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust."

Still more is he conscious of his powerlessness to discharge his obligation to Macbeth.

> "More is thy due than more than all can pay."

Such a phrase as this can carry with it only one interpretation. All that Duncan can give to Macbeth is his due; and the best that Duncan had to give was the succession. Had he named Macbeth as his heir, not only would the witches' prophecy have received a natural fulfilment, but also the audience would have accepted it as the most satisfactory arrangement that could have been made. Macbeth had shown himself fit for the kingship by being kingly. His bravery was unimpeachable. His presence carried respect. His

address was dignified. His character, so far as it had been displayed, was unstained. How could Duncan have provided better for the future? Was there anything unconstitutional in such an arrangement? Macbeth was of the royal house. Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's sons, were by their years unfit to rule. They had taken no part in the fight. The succession of the kinsman of full age, as we saw in *Hamlet*, was the usual rule in the North.

Such may well have been the speculations of Macbeth, when his hopes were dashed by Duncan's seizing the opportunity to name Malcolm Prince of Cumberland, a title which carried with it the succession. To Macbeth, coming as it did after Duncan's grateful acknowledgment of his obligations, "more than all can pay," this event was a sort of anticlimax. The reaction was intense, and at the very moment when his disappointment was at its height Duncan announced his intention of paying him a visit. The prospect of having his sovereign within the walls of his own castle gives form to all the visions of murder which the news of his destiny has conjured up in Macbeth's brain.

> "The Prince of Cumberland!—That is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!
> Let not light see my black and deep desires:
> The eye wink at the hand! Yet let that be,
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see."

Meanwhile (Act i. Scene 5) Lady Macbeth has been

at home, and has only just received a letter from her husband telling her the news of his interview with the witches. Of this letter Shakespeare has only given us an imperfect copy. As there is no mention of the fatal blow to Macbeth's hopes implied in Malcolm's appointment, it must have been written before Macbeth's interview with the king. It lays the greatest stress on the promised kingship as the real gist of the witches' prophecy, to which the thaneship of Cawdor is a mere prologue. One thing is clear, Macbeth thoroughly believes the promise.

So far we have only looked at Macbeth with the eyes of the world, now we are to see him through those of his wife.

> "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full of the milk of human kindness,
> To catch the nearest way."

This is a new view of Macbeth, whom we have already seen contemplating *murder* as the readiest step to the throne. It is plain, therefore, that the ordinary acceptation of the words is not the one which Shakespeare designed should be their meaning. The whole turns upon the true interpretation of the word *kindness*. *Kind* in Shakespeare's day meant *nature*, *kindly* meant *natural*, as in *kindly fruits of the earth*. The milk suggests the *essence* as its true signification, and the whole passage rather suggests some meaning such as

this: "Yet do I mistrust thy character; you are too thoroughly human, you hardly rise sufficiently above the weaknesses inherent in human kind to catch the nearest way." "Thou wouldst be great: art not without ambition": but you lack the disregard of principle which should attend it. "What thou wouldst highly, that wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, and yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'dst have, great Glamis, that which cries, 'This thou must do, if thou have it; and that which rather thou dost fear to do, than wishest should be undone.'" This criticism of Macbeth's character, which stamps itself at once as the work of an adept at reading the secrets of the human heart, explains to the audience much that had before been puzzling. It shows exactly why the ambitious man caught so strongly at the prophecy which fell in so aptly with his desires. It shows how it was that the crime which suggested itself as necessary for the consummation of his hopes was dismissed with such relief.

> "Come what come may,
> Time and the hour runs through the roughest day."

It makes plain to us why the "horrid image" was so readily recovered when the prospect of a natural succession was eliminated.

In the view of his wife Macbeth is held back from crime, not because his nature revolts against it as such, but because he has not within himself sufficient "superiority to ordinary frailty" to rise to the requirements of

the situation, and nothing but some external force will suffice "to screw his courage to the sticking-place." That this is true is already obvious to the audience, for they have seen him wavering and irresolute till the appointment of the Prince of Cumberland compelled him to decision. To Lady Macbeth this knowledge of his character is the result of years of study, and she knows too from her own experience where the external force is to be found.

> "Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round."

Hardly has Lady Macbeth decided upon the part she will have to play in steadying her husband's character, when the possibility of having to play one of even greater prominence is presented to her by the announcement that Duncan will be at her castle that very night. Instantly the notion of murder passes through her brain. The very hoarseness of the breathless messenger who had borne the tidings suggests an evil omen.

> "The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements."

It is as a surrendering himself into *her* hands, *her* battlements, that the news presents itself. It is the part of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, that she prepares herself to play. She knows her husband's

ambitious hopes, and she is aware of the weakness of his character which will be a bar to his success. She will act for him, and win his eternal gratitude by her conduct. The expressions she uses show that she is not dead to the horror of the situation. Woman as she is, she feels to the full the unnaturalness of the action she contemplates. Only the aid of the murdering ministers whose prophecy her husband had recounted, and the concealing cloak of darkness, could enable her to do the deed.

> "Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, topful
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse;
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell!
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes;
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry, 'Hold, Hold!'"

At the moment of her greatest exaltation her husband enters. "My dearest love, Duncan comes here to-night." Her answer, "And when goes hence?" shows him that the same thought had occurred to both.

"*Macbeth.* To-morrow, as he purposes.
Lady M. O, never
Shall sun that morrow see!"

The union between Macbeth and his lady is complete. Like Brutus and Cassius, the one is the mental counterpart of the other; but, unlike Brutus and Cassius, the partnership of Lady Macbeth and her husband is one in which the abler takes the lead. It is to be the husband's work to lull to security; the wife's to deal the fatal blow. This must be the meaning of the lines—

"Your face, my thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters:—To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it. He that's coming
Must be provided for: and you shall put
This night's great business into my despatch;
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.
Macbeth. We will speak further.
Lady M. Only look up clear;
To alter favour ever is to fear:
Leave all the rest to me."

It is impossible to conceive a greater contrast than that between Macbeth's castle, as the audience know it to be, a mere death-trap, and its external appearance to the eyes of the guileless Duncan (Act i. Scene 6). The charm of its situation, the balmy air, the martins twittering round its towers, all suggest peace and repose.

Nor is there anything in the manner of the mistress of the castle to suggest anything but complete security. Whatever was Lady Macbeth's real character, there can have been nothing in her outward appearance to suggest the tiger. Throughout the play there is nothing to show that in the eyes of the world she was anything but the most womanly of women. But as Duncan himself had said, "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face," and the audience are aware that under that charming exterior is a heart which has steeled itself to the commission of murder. Outwardly, the relations of Macbeth and his wife are the reverse of the truth. No one looking at the rude warrior, Bellona's bridegroom, and at his gentle lady, could have guessed that in the moral world hers was the superior power, and that his strength vanished so soon as it had to deal, not with a steel-clad warrior, but with a problem of the intellect or of the heart.

The welcome over, and Duncan at last an unsuspecting guest within his castle walls, the problem "to be or not to be" forces itself on Macbeth for immediate solution; and in a remarkable soliloquy (Act i. Scene 7) Shakespeare displays him as summing up in his own mind the *pros* and *cons* of the attempt. What is Macbeth's point of view is obvious. He is not a Hamlet to think too precisely on the event, who would sacrifice the advantage of immediate action for fear of losing something of the vengeance he hoped to secure for the murderer of his father in the life to come.

Indeed Macbeth's considerations go no further than the present world. The other he is prepared, as he says, "to jump." His sole thought is whether he can calculate upon success here. Macbeth is too much of a statesman not to have observed certain facts. Murder, he knows, breeds murder, and rebellion rebellion; and he sees with great clearness that he will have to reckon upon this in his own case with greater certainty than usual.

> "He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed: then as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bare the knife myself."

To any other man this threefold relationship to Duncan—kinsman, subject, host—would have appealed as a reason for not murdering him at all. But not so to Macbeth. Of horror at the enormity of his crime there is not a trace. The sole effect of the summary is to make it clear to him that a more than usual stir will be made about such a murder. This is made the more manifest by the next passage.

> "Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off."

There is the rub. Macbeth can count upon an unusual manifestation of horror. In his case there is no room,

as in that of Brutus and Cassius, for the slightest hope that the murder of the sovereign will be regarded as an act of patriotism. Here there will be nothing to conceal the deformity of the crime. On the other hand, since his sole motive is ambition, the risk of losing his object is so great that the attempt seems to him ridiculous.

> "I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
> And falls on the other side."

Accordingly, he decides to proceed no further, and on the appearance of his wife tells her so. But mark how he does it. Had he explained to Lady Macbeth the real grounds on which his latest decision had been made he could hardly have failed to produce an impression, but in face of his wife he has not the moral courage to give his true reason, viz. that the risk is too great, and therefore he dare not do it. On the contrary, he makes a sham excuse.

> "He hath honoured me of late; and I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon."

Lady Macbeth sees through the excuse in an instant. Not the slightest notice does she take of it, but at once and with absolute truth puts her finger on the real reason.

> "Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire?"

Macbeth is hit in his weak point. Had he been a strong man such a taunt would not have sufficed to move him from a position which he had taken up after a careful consideration of probabilities. He would have reasoned with his wife and explained to her the why and the wherefore, basing his views on political experience, in which he might claim to be the more skilled. But Macbeth is not strong. Before his wife's passionate address he can only falter out "If we should fail," whereas this argument which had convinced him had been based upon the supposition that the crime had been successful. The taunt of cowardice had, however, destroyed Macbeth's reasoning power, and when his wife produced a scheme for securing immediate success, he allows himself to forget all the sound arguments which had been based upon the view that immediate success would only prepare the way for ultimate failure.

The plot is a very simple one. Duncan's chamberlains are to be drugged, and when the murder has been accomplished the guilt is to be put off on them. In the delight of the prospect of coming action, Macbeth forgets all the arguments which had suggested themselves to his cooler judgment. Such a scheme was far too simple to divert attention from the real authors of the crime; but

"I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show;
False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

The next scene, the first of Act ii., shows us Banquo and his son Fleance up and about. Seemingly Banquo resists the wish to sleep as fearing to trust himself alone with the cursed thoughts that ever since the meeting with the witches have disturbed his repose, and puts off his departure to his lodgings to the last moment. The entrance of Macbeth leads to his sounding Banquo to try what influence the prophecy has had on his mind. Perhaps Banquo may become a confederate; but the loyal Banquo puts off the suggestion. He will keep "his bosom franchised and allegiance clear," and with a kindly good-night they separate. A moment later Macbeth has dismissed his servant and addresses himself to his task.

Like a true Highlander he finds that portents attend him. By second sight he creates before himself a dagger in the air which even leads him on. The bloody drops upon it foretell the success of his enterprise. Elated with the prospect of action, he steps boldly forward. The bell which his wife rings to give the signal that she has played her part seems to him ominous.

"I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell."

In Act ii. Scene 2 the audience are asked to give their attention to Lady Macbeth. She it is who has played the larger part in the preparations. She has drugged the grooms, and so effectively that she has gone within an ace of killing them outright. She has opened the doors, that nothing may interfere with the silence of her husband's entry. The daggers have been placed by her in position. Only the fatal blow needs to be struck, and "had he not resemb'ed my father as he slept," she had done that too. In the hands of the steeled warrior Macbeth there had been no such hesitation. His blow had gone home, and now with hands all bloody from the crime he joins his wife.

On the two the difference wrought by the commission of the deed is most remarkable. Macbeth the Highlander, brimful of superstition and terror of the unseen world, is completely unnerved. In his trepidation he has forgotten the details of the plot, and has brought away the daggers which were to have been left with the grooms. Confronted with the need of going back—

> "I'll go no more;
> I am afraid to think what I have done,
> Look on't again I dare not."

Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, shows no sign either of flinching or of superstition. Duncan once dead, she has no superstitious fear of looking on his body. To her the dead are but as pictures; and in very scorn of her husband's moral infirmity, she snatches the daggers

from his hands, and, after smearing the grooms with blood taken from Duncan's wounds, she leaves the daggers with them.

While she is away, Macbeth, with superstitious horror, is aghast at the imagined difficulty of clearing his hands from blood-stains. On her return she takes the lead again, and insists on Macbeth undressing himself so as to colour the pretence of sleep. It seems as if, having once braced herself to act, she could carry out her part better than her husband, the man of action. Looked at from a critical point of view, the murder of Duncan can hardly be regarded as a work of fine art. The hope of palming off the murder on the grooms must be pronounced slight. Their very drunkenness would seem a proof in their favour. That some one had drugged them was too obvious not to suggest itself. Then, too, there were witnesses of Macbeth's watchfulness in Banquo and Fleance, not to mention his own servant. In short, nothing but good luck could possibly screen the real murderers from detection. As it happened, this luck was Macbeth's.

The murder was discovered in a most natural way. Macduff had been ordered to wait on Duncan at an early hour. He and the other attendant lords had been lodged outside the castle—a fact which would account for Banquo's and Fleance's late stirring. Accordingly, at the appointed hour he knocks up the sleepy porter (Act ii. Scene 3), and in doing so makes such a disturbance that Macbeth is roused, and reaches the gate just as it

is opened. Confronted with men, and nerved by the necessity of action, Macbeth's deportment is excellent. Nothing could be better than the ease with which he receives Macduff. The shortness of his answer to Lenox—who, be it remembered, was but a youth,—"'Twas a rough night," alone betrays his nervous anxiety for the discovery. Equally good appears the readiness with which Macbeth, forgetful of his nightly fears, hurries with Lenox to the scene of the murder. Even his supposed outburst of passion in which he slew the grooms is not indefensible. Macduff, it is clear, had made no discovery of the murderers. Lenox, who had seen the grooms, is completely taken in.

> "Those of his chamber, as it seemed, had done it :
> Their hands and faces were all badged with blood,
> So were their daggers, which, unwiped, we found
> Upon their pillows : they stared, and were distracted ;
> No man's life was to be trusted with them."

Whether Macduff did or did not have his suspicions roused by Macbeth's action was never known. For Lady Macbeth, either true to Macduff's description,

> "O, gentle lady,
> 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak :
> The repetition in a woman's ear
> Would murder as it fell,"

or as a ruse, fainted, and for the moment diverted all attention to herself.

Meanwhile Malcolm and Donalbain, young, astounded,

and knowing not whom to trust, have remained tongue-tied, and seize the opportunity given by the prosaic Banquo, who suggests that they had better dress as a preliminary to discussing the matter, to take to flight.

Than this circumstance nothing more lucky could have befallen Macbeth. Had full investigation taken place on the spot, it is impossible to see how suspicion could have been averted. As it was, the flight of the king's sons instantly threw suspicion upon them. More investigation seemed to be unnecessary. Without more ado Macbeth is called to wear the vacant crown, and Duncan's corpse is hurried off to burial (Act iv. Scene 4).

Here the climax of Macbeth's good fortune is reached. The witches' prophecy, so far as it relates to himself, has received its fulfilment. Chance has thrown Duncan into his power, a still greater chance has diverted attention from the true assassin, and at the same time has removed from the country Duncan's appointed heir. There is no unanimity among the nobles. Rosse goes to attend the ceremony of the coronation ; Macduff retires to his country seat. Even if they have suspicions, they dare not utter them to each other. Macbeth has indeed been fortunate. Whether he will continue to be so must be seen in the sequel.

Part II

We have now traced the effect of the witches' prophecy on Macbeth's mind, and followed out the steps by which

he brought about its fulfilment. We are now to see Macbeth engaged in a very different task. Obviously there are three ways in which the subject of a prophecy, who is aware of his promised destiny, may treat the prediction. It is possible that, like Macbeth, he may take active steps to hasten its fulfilment; or he may adopt an attitude of indifference; or possibly he may use his activity to avert a destiny which he dislikes. Hitherto Macbeth's action has been helpful; but will he maintain the same attitude? So far the prophecy has been in his favour; will he not become indifferent, not to say hostile, when it is Banquo's turn to reap its promises?

> "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.
> Not so happy, yet much happier.
> Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none."

The answer to this question is the key to the second part of the story.

Between Act ii. and Act iii. some interval of time is supposed to elapse; and when it opens Banquo appears as the first object of interest. In his mind the suspicion engendered by the witches' prophecy has begun to work. Banquo, it must be remembered, held in his hands the whole of the threads which connected Macbeth with the murder—the witches' prophecy (Act i. Scene 3), which might be regarded as the origin of the crime; the suspicious speech of Macbeth, which seemed to ask for assistance in some mysterious design (Act i. Scene 7); and last, the circumstantial evidence (Act ii. Scene 1),

which showed Macbeth to have been stirring in the castle after others had left. Why, then, is it that he is present (Act iii. Scene 1) at Forres? He could hardly have been a welcome guest, he the man who carried in his breast the secret of Macbeth's childless dynasty and the succession of his own line. Yet it seems that he is in the place of honour, invited as the first guest at a gathering of Scotland's nobility. Is that all the reason of his coming? Can it be that he, like Duncan, is thrusting himself into the den of the lion?

Macbeth is all civility and attention, but some casual inquiries of his show to the audience how eager he is to make himself fully acquainted with the probable movements of Banquo and those of his son Fleance.

"Ride you this afternoon?"

"Is't far you ride?"

"Goes Fleance with you?"

Banquo gone and the courtiers dispersed, Macbeth waits not a moment in making use of the information he had gained. In surly tones he bids an attendant fetch some men who have, it appears, been ordered to wait his orders. The attendant goes, and while he is away Macbeth utters a short soliloquy which completely explains the new situation.

"To be thus, is nothing;
But to be safely thus:—Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature

Reigns that which would be feared : 'tis much he dares ;
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear." . . .

. . . . .

They [the witches] hailed him father to a line of kings :
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding."

Here, then, is the cause of Macbeth's hostility to Banquo—fear in the present, envy for the future.

" For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind ;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered—

. . . . . .

Only for them."

Had Macbeth been a man of cool, logical temperament, he would have accepted the inevitable ; but he was not so, and his anger at Banquo's good fortune led him to attempt the impossible, by taking measures to frustrate the fulfilment of the latter part of a prophecy, the former part of which had been fulfilled in his own person. Instead of being an accomplice of the witches, he now prepares himself to be their antagonist.

" Rather than so, come, fate, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance " (*à l'outrance*).

Macbeth's further speech is interrupted by the entrance of two ruffians, dressed doubtless after the

fashion of professional bravos; old friends of Macbeth's, it seems, to whom his project has already been explained. A few words from Macbeth, spoken with an air of superiority, sum up the points on which he had insisted in a previous interview. It is clear that he has incensed his creatures against Banquo by depicting him as the cause of all their misfortunes; and by a final stroke he places himself by their side, as one who fears to suffer like injuries from the same man. Banquo's life is to be taken as their revenge, but as Macbeth's precaution. With him Fleance, as equally obnoxious to Macbeth with his father, is also to perish. This settled, the murderers depart; and as Macbeth turns on his heel he repeats the lines—

> "It is concluded :—Banquo, thy soul's flight,
> If it find heaven, must find it out to-night."

The next scene (Act iii. Scene 2) shows us Lady Macbeth; and it seems that, like her husband, the idea that the full enjoyment of his fortune is marred by the presence of Banquo is uppermost in her mind.

> "Nought's had, all's spent,
> Where our desire is got without content:
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
> Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy."

It is clear, however, that remorse sits easier on her than on her lord. At any rate, when they are together it is she that shows the cheerier face. But even here there is a little rift within the lute. Since the murder Mac-

beth has been more than formerly apart from his wife. His latest conspiracy against Banquo has been made without being communicated to her. Nay more, he deliberately designs to keep her in the dark. Speaking of the entertainment he says—

> "Let your remembrance apply to Banquo ;
> Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue."

A moment later, however, his intended reticence breaks down before his wife's presence, and in guarded language he gives her to know what is in the wind. His lady receives the announcement with a wonder which Macbeth takes as a compliment to his sagacity and resolution.

> "Thou marvellest at my words : but hold thee still ;
> Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill."

Macbeth, at any rate, had grasped one of the mottoes of Machiavelianism which was completely hidden from the murderers of Cæsar.

Nor does Macbeth's luck desert him yet. Hitherto his good fortune has been marvellous. Duncan's visit, the murderous design, clumsy as it was, carried through without a hitch, the suspicious flight of Malcolm and Donalbain, Banquo's timely ride, were a series of coincidences which seemed to mark Macbeth as the very darling of fortune. She will give him one more success, and it is not undeserved.

The next scene (Act iii. Scene 3) shows us the mur-

derers waiting for their victim. A third murderer joins them, whom Mr. Irving, according to a paper published by him in the *Nineteenth Century*, believes to have been Macbeth's confidential attendant. Exactly as was expected, Banquo and Fleance leave their horses and approach the castle on foot. The attack is delivered. Banquo is down, but—mark how the prophecy refuses to be frustrated—Fleance escapes. That he does so is designed by Shakespeare to be in no way the fault of Macbeth. The accident is due, not to Macbeth's hasty reinforcement of the party, but to the awkwardness of the *1st Murderer*, who, forgetting that they had more than one man to deal with, dashed out the light.

Here, then, is the turn of Macbeth's fortune. Heretofore complete success. Here partial success, partial failure. "Banquo is down, Fleance is fled."

While murder is being perpetrated without, feasting and revelry (Act iii. Scene 4) are the order of the day within. The guests are seated at a round table. The king and queen alone have not taken their places; and on the appearance at the door of one of the murderers, Macbeth steps aside for a moment and speaks in undertones. In hurried whispers the murderer tells his news. Banquo, at any rate, is down; but the escape of Fleance is a grievous disappointment to Macbeth.

> "Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect;
> Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
> As broad and general as the casing air:

> But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
> To saucy doubts and fears."

Meanwhile the feast is waiting, and it is the queen who recalls Macbeth to his guests. With the readiest grace he complains of Banquo's unkindness in having marred the completeness of the gathering by missing the hour.

> "Here had we now our country's honour roofed,
> Were the graced person of our Banquo present;
> Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
> Than pity for mischance!"

Delighted with the affability of the sovereign, Rosse, as possibly the oldest lord, asks him to take the vacant place; and now comes in what from an actor's point of view is one of the most difficult points of the play.

To the reader, however, no such difficulty occurs. Shakespeare's meaning is perfectly plain. The ghost of Banquo has seated itself in the vacant chair; but the context shows that though it is visible to Macbeth the murderer, it is invisible to the eyes of the assembled barons, and even to those of the queen. It therefore follows as a matter of course that the ghost is invisible to the audience. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, the ghost was visible on the platform to every one on the stage and, therefore, to the audience. In *Macbeth* it is visible only to one person of all who are present on the stage, and therefore must be invisible to the audience. To my mind, indeed, there would be a far finer display of acting if the actor of Macbeth were called on to

represent the feelings of a man who saw a ghost invisible to others than can possibly be evoked by the present method of rendering the scene.

If we eliminate from this scene the absurdity of a ghost visible to Macbeth and to the audience, but invisible to the other actors on the stage, the chief interest in the scene lies in the display of Macbeth's contest with the supernatural world, against which he is now engaged in a duel *à l'outrance*. Nothing can be better than the way in which Macbeth, in the intervals between the appearance of the ghost, rallies again and again, and time after time, aided by his lady, assumes his easy demeanour, only to be again driven into frenzy by the apparition of his murdered victim.

" *Lady M.* My worthy lord,
Your noble friends do lack you.
Macb. I do forget :—
Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends ;
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to all ;
Then I'll sit down :—Give me some wine, fill full."

Every word of his conversation with Lady Macbeth must be taken as unheard by the lords, who sit merely in rapt amazement at the dumb show enacted before their eyes. To the very last they have no suspicion of the sights which Macbeth sees, and Lady Macbeth's excuse to break up the meeting on the ground of Macbeth's illness is accepted at once.

Directly the ghost is once fairly gone, Macbeth

is himself again. Against the machinations of men he has ample resource. No precaution has been neglected. Not one of the nobles present but in his house there is a government spy. No thought of remorse checks his career.

> "I am in blood
> Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

As the scope of this scene is to show Macbeth's struggle with his supernatural opponents, the next, Act iii. Scene 5, supposing it to be Shakespearian, appropriately enough recalls to our minds the weird sisters, and shows their queen Hecate contriving ruin for the man who has once profited by the witches' patronage, but is now rebelliously recalcitrant. Her aim is to

> "draw him on to his confusion:
> He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
> His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear:
> And you all know, security
> Is mortals' chiefest enemy."

The opening of Scene 6 introduces a new element. Hitherto there have been no indications that Macbeth's conduct has excited the suspicions of his nobles. It is true that Macbeth, in his last conversation with Banquo, has mentioned the fact that the late king's sons were spreading "strange inventions" among their entertainers in England and Scotland; but the Scottish nobility seems as yet almost untainted. There is, however, one

exception. Macduff has declined to accept Macbeth's invitation. In this scene, however, we have a conversation expressly introduced to show that suspicion has been aroused by the singular coincidences of Macbeth's good fortune. The speaker is Lenox, the young lord who had been the witness of Macbeth's slaughter of the grooms. The person he is addressing is vaguely defined as a lord, *i.e.* he represents the nobility as a class, and it is not the first time that Lenox has broached the subject.

"My former speeches have but hit your thoughts,
Which can interpret further: only, I say,
Things have been strangely borne: the gracious Duncan
Was pitied of Macbeth:—marry, he was dead:—
And the right-valiant Banquo walked too late;
Whom, you may say, if 't please you, Fleance killed,
For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.
Who cannot want the thought, how monstrous
It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain
To kill their gracious father?—damned fact!
How it did grieve Macbeth! did he not straight,
In pious rage, the two delinquents tear,
That were the slaves of drink, and thralls of sleep:
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too;
For 'twould have angered any heart alive
To hear the men deny it."

There is a story told of Talleyrand that when asked what he thought of Pichegru's death in the dungeon on the eve of his trial, he answered—"I should say that he died very suddenly and in the very nick of time." It

is a similar coincidence which has excited the suspicions of Lenox, and he continues—

> "So that, I say,
> He has borne all things well : and I do think,
> That, had he Duncan's sons under his key
> (As, an't please heaven, he shall not), they should find
> What 'twere to kill a father ; so should Fleance.
> But, peace !—for from broad words, and 'cause he failed
> His presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear,
> Macduff lives in disgrace."

So far Lenox, but the lord carries the narrative a step further. Macduff, impatient of disgrace, has fled to England to try and get foreign aid for the overthrow of the tyrant.

We may pass rapidly over the next scene (Act iv. Scene 1). Macbeth, like Saul, in his nervousness of new danger foretold by the apparition of the murdered Banquo, again seeks the witches, and in pursuance of Hecate's plot the witches contrive to goad Macbeth to desperation and at the same time lull him into a false security by misleading oracles.

> "Beware Macduff ;
> Beware the thane of Fife."

And

> "Be bloody, bold, and resolute ; laugh to scorn
> The power of man, for none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth."

Again,

> "Be lion-mettled, proud ; and take no care
> Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are :

> Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
> Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
> Shall come against him."

If destruction is to come from no woman-born man, and is not to make its appearance till woods can leave their sites, Macbeth may well feel secure; but yet he cannot help asking whether, after all, Banquo's issue shall have the throne. Can it be that

> "For Banquo's issue I have filed my mind?"

Yes indeed! From this there is no escape, and a procession of Scottish kings showing only too plainly in their features the proof of Banquo's lineage take their way before his horror-stricken vision, and vanish from his sight.

From this moment Macbeth's one idea is to prosecute a reckless revenge on all who can cross him. His first victim is to be Macduff; but as Macduff has escaped to England the fury of the tyrant falls on his innocent wife and prattling children (Act iv. Scene 2). Meanwhile the doom foretold by the witches is slowly working itself out, not by the aid of the enemies of Macbeth, but, as it seems, in spite of them. Macduff, as we saw, fled across the Border with a view to soliciting the aid of England; but on his arrival he finds his greatest obstacle in the attitude of Malcolm himself (Act iv. Scene 3). That prince, true to the maxim that children generally contrive to avoid the most obvious faults of their parents, has replaced his father's guilelessness by a

universal suspicion, and at his first interview with Macduff it is obvious that he regards that nobleman as only another of a series of spies whom Macbeth had sent to lure him into danger. To Macduff's protestations of honesty Malcolm pays no heed. "I am not treacherous," says Macduff. "But Macbeth is," Malcolm replies. The fact that Macduff has left wife and child exposed to the tyrant is taken by Malcolm as the strongest proof that Macduff is acting in league with the usurper. The most Malcolm can be got to say is, "You may be rightly just, whatever I shall think." It is Macduff's genuine outburst of grief for his country handed over to tyranny because goodness will not even stir on her behalf, that first raises any doubt of Macduff's insincerity in Malcolm's mind. Yet he does not yield. He only puts upon Macduff a still severer test. With an extraordinary force of colouring he paints himself as one from whom any country would be blessed to escape, a monster in lust and avarice completely devoid of virtue.

> "The king-becoming graces,
> As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
> Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
> Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,
> I have no relish of them; but abound
> In the division of each several crime,
> Acting it many ways. Nay, had I power, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth."

This catalogue of horrors completely unnerves Macduff. If this was to be Scotland's choice, between a tyrant in *esse* and a monster in *posse*, her lot was indeed a hard one. Her regeneration was a thing unhoped for.

> "Fare thee well!
> These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself
> Have banished me from Scotland.—O, my breast,
> Thy hope ends here!"

The genuine honesty of Macduff's grief has an immediate effect. Malcolm's suspicion is at length disarmed. He accepts Macduff as honest and unsays the terrible list of crimes which he had charged upon himself, and speaks of the preparations he himself has made for war. Now, however, it is Macduff's turn to be suspicious. He stands silent.

> "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once,
> 'Tis hard to reconcile."

To give time for Macduff's recovery Shakespeare at this point introduces a scene which, while serving a dramatic purpose, was also useful as a compliment to the reigning dynasty, the head of which, James I., took a conspicuous pleasure in going through the ceremony by touching for the king's evil. By the time this is over, Macduff has recovered his wonted equilibrium, and a new character comes upon the scene. This is Rosse, who it seems has escaped the country after the murder of Macduff's family. His tidings are full of hope for Malcolm. He brings the news

"Of many worthy fellows that were out;
. . . . .
Now is the time of help; your eye in Scotland
Would create soldiers, make our women fight
To doff their dire distresses."

These with Siward's force from Northumberland may well give prospect of Macbeth's overthrow. A throne which can at once resist invasion from abroad and insurrection at home, must indeed be firmly planted. To Macduff, however, his tidings are those of despair. For he tells as the cause of the insurrection the anger which has been created by the slaughter of all those that Macduff holds dear. Here, then, it is that Macbeth had overshot the mark. Had he allowed Macduff's escape to go unpunished, he might yet have reigned. It is the blind unmeaning cruelty of his massacre of Macduff's family which, on the one hand, has stirred all Scotland against him, and on the other, has removed from Malcolm's breast the last shreds of suspicion of Macduff's honesty. The scene closes with a hopeful forecast of the future.

"This tune goes manly.
Come, go we to the king; our power is ready;
Our lack is nothing but our leave: Macbeth
Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above
Put on their instruments. Receive what cheer you may:
The night is long that never finds the day."

Meanwhile what has become of Lady Macbeth? Since the banquet scene she has been absent from the stage.

It seems that she has been slipping out of Macbeth's life. In Duncan's murder she was the complete partner, not to say the contriver of the crime. But the plot which deprived Banquo of his life was formed without her knowledge, and was only disclosed to her at the moment of its execution; of the horrid massacre of Lady Macduff she was never told at all. Can it be that she has ceased to be useful to Macbeth? Having crossed the Rubicon, and engaged himself not in midnight assassination but in open light-defying slaughter, did he need her no more? Or can it be that her nerves, strung up by an effort of the will to perform one deed of blood, have failed to respond any longer to the mandates of the brain? Shakespeare is ready with his answer. The king and queen (Act v. Scene 1) have left the palace of Forres, and are now ensconced in the strong castle of Dunsinane. The personages on the stage, a doctor of physic and a waiting gentlewoman, suggest at once the presence of disease and the sex of the patient. The gentlewoman's words put the matter out of doubt.

"Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon it, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep."

"Ever since her husband went into the field"; that is it. Lady Macbeth's strength lay not in endurance for her own sake, but in helping her husband. So long as

she has to steady him, and to shield him from the effects of discovery, she can play her part to a marvel; but now that murder is out and her husband in the field, and his fate to be decided not by dexterous hypocrisy, but by hard blows, there is no longer a place for her, and her nerve power, strained to the uttermost during the earlier period of concealment, has completely broken down. Again and again her brain automatically runs over the horrors of the past. Sleeping or waking, it is never at rest. Now she braces her husband for his task. "Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard?" Now she strives in vain to cleanse her womanly hands from the stains of blood. "Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Now it is the thought of Banquo which mingles with her recollection of the night when Duncan died. "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale:—I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave." Poor woman! Like Portia, in sharing her husband's secret she had overrated her woman's strength. It is a relief, a scene or two later, when we hear of her death, even though it may have been, like Portia's, wrought by her own hand.

The lady's part is played. To adapt Shakespeare's words to her case:

> "*She* is in her grave;
> After life's fitful fever she sleeps well;
> Treason has done its worst: nor steel, nor poison.

> Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
> Can touch *her* further."

But to Macbeth the crisis of his fate is yet to come. Like Richard III, the sense of power rises as his circumstances become more desperate (Act v. Scene 3). On the one side, Lenox, Angus, and all the train of Scottish nobles (Act v. Scene 2) are burning to revenge the wrongs of Macduff; on the other (Act v. Scene 4), Malcolm, old Siward, all the forces of England's might are marching to his overthrow. Of all the men who march beneath his banner, he cannot trust one.

> "Those he commands move only in command,
> Nothing in love."

In the midst of these manifold disasters Macbeth's mind seems rather to be exalted than cast down. In prospect of battle he is still the man who quelled Macdonwald and overthrew the forces of invading Norway.

> "I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
> The time has been, my senses would have cooled
> To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
> Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
> As life were in't: I have supped full with horrors;
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once start me."

In face of the death of his wife he is as calm as Brutus. The man who at Duncan's death shuddered because he could not say "Amen" now holds the sombre creed of the fatalist. "Life is but a walking shadow . . . it is a tale told

by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." What must be, must; and it is in this mood that he meets disaster after disaster.

> "Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
> Does come against him."

This moves Macbeth to greater stoicism.

> "Blow wind! come wrack!
> At least we'll die with harness on our back."

In the joy of battle Macbeth is still Bellona's bridegroom. The youthful Siward, the pride of England's youth, falls dead at his feet. Macbeth will never die a suicide like Brutus. "Why should I play the Roman fool, and die on mine own sword?" But fate will have its due: the warrior unconquerable by any born of woman falls a victim to Macduff; but he is great even in his death. Face to face with his slayer, all hope of respite gone, Macbeth dies a warrior.

Here the long contest between the supernatural and the human is brought to a close, and humanity has not been the victor. Every device of Shakespeare has been designed to accentuate the overweening influence of the unseen world. So long as Macbeth is striving to bring about the fulfilment of the prophecy, he is a bungler; but at every turn the unseen agency brings fortune to his aid. So soon, however, as he bends his efforts to defeat the intentions of the supernatural world, fortune deserts him. Everything goes wrong. Fleance escapes. Suspicion seizes his

nobles. Macduff flies, and Macbeth's insensate revenge has the effect of bringing to a head the smouldering anger of the nobility. Finally, the unseen universe interferes directly in the scene, and by its deceitful oracles lulls him into a state of false security. Were it not for the prophecy about Birnam wood, Macbeth would have met his foes in the field, and not cooped himself up in his castle of Dunsinane, where, as he says himself, "he is tied as a bear to the stake." Had it not been for his belief in his charmed existence he would never have risked his life in single combat with all and sundry of the besieging host. He the *protégé* of destiny had attempted to defy his patron; and to the last farthing he was called upon to pay the price of his temerity.

KING LEAR

Part I

If it were asked on what text Shakespeare was preaching when he composed the tragedy of King Lear, we might answer: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man through whom the offence cometh. Good were it for that man if he had never been born." To show fully the working of his theory of life, Shakespeare was compelled to adopt a plot of unusual complexity. The plots of *Hamlet*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Macbeth* all move along single lines; in *King Lear* we have two distinct stories acting and reacting upon one another, and the reading of the moral of one is not complete unless due regard is paid to the teaching of the other.

As is usual with Shakespeare, the opening scene, simple as it appears, gives the key to the situation. The figures on the stage are two noblemen, Kent and Gloucester, and a lad or young gentleman. Kent's first remarks show us the courtier's astonishment at a sudden change of purpose in the king.

"I thought the king had more affected (*i.e.* cared more for) the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

Glo. It did *always* seem so to us; but *now*, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most."

From this we learn that the keynote of the king's character is fickleness.

Shakespeare next explains, through the mouth of the father, that the young gentleman, Edmund, is a bastard son of the Duke of Gloucester, born after the birth of a legitimate son of that nobleman; and he asks us to observe with what unblushing effrontery Gloucester, in the presence of his child, speaks of his sin. The characteristic, then, of Gloucester's character is disregard of moral obligations. Levity, both in regard to matters of state and matters of family relationships, is the characteristic of Lear's court.

A moment later Lear and his court enter, and a speech by Lear reveals what he calls his *darker* purpose, though we know that it has already become the common property of the court. The king's present pleasure is to "shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths, while we unburdened crawl toward death." With this view he has made up his mind to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, and the shares of the two former, as we have learned from Gloucester, "are so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety." So far Lear's plan is at any rate plausible. He will do

what Charles V of Spain actually did. It is not an heroic course, though there is nothing in it of actual imbecility; but the impression of Lear suggested in the opening scene is completely confirmed when the spectators see him, apparently on the spur of the moment and for no object whatsoever except the gratification of mere wantonness, for the shares have already been settled, calling upon his daughters to enter into a grotesque competition which can make the most profuse protestations of affection.

> "That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge."

Into this unnatural and futile contest Goneril and Regan, the two elder daughters of Lear, enter eagerly; but with Cordelia, his youngest daughter, the case is different. Already, while her sisters were making their fulsome declarations of attachment, she had expressed her inability to enter into such an arena. "What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent." Lear, however, presents his request to her in its most odious form.

> "What can you say, to draw
> A third more opulent than your sisters?"

To this demand Cordelia makes no reply. "Speak," says her father. "Nothing," is her answer, which is, of course, the only possible answer to the question, in the form in which Lear had chosen to put it. Forced to speak, Cordelia confines herself to an almost legal definition of the relationship between father and child.

"I love your majesty
According to my bond ; nor more, nor less.
. . . . . .
Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me : I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you."

So much of her speech is for her father ; but Cordelia does not allow her sisters to escape unrebuked.

"Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you, all ? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty :
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all."

In thus acting it is impossible to praise Cordelia's foresight. She had in her somewhat of her father's obstinacy and imperiousness of character, and more *finesse* might have prevented the outburst which followed. Lear's anger knows no bounds. With a revulsion of feeling which it is difficult to accept as true to nature, he curses Cordelia by all his gods.

"Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee, from this, for ever."

At this crisis Kent interferes; but the intrusion of his good offices only serves still further to exasperate

the king. In his wrath he divests Cordelia of all share in his lands, divides her inheritance between her sisters, invests them and their husbands with the whole conduct and revenue of the state, and reserves to himself merely the title of king and a retinue of one hundred knights. This was to be maintained by his daughters, with whom, month by month about, he designed to take up his residence. The violence of the king's wrath, and his obvious farewell to reason, only make Kent's interposition the more energetic.

> "Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
> Upon thy foul disease. Revoke thy doom:
> Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat
> I'll tell thee thou dost evil."

The sole result is to make Lear pronounce on Kent a sentence of banishment, which deprives the king of the one upright nobleman who might have acted as a conscience.

Kent gone, the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy, who have been visiting Lear's court as suitors for Cordelia's hand, make their entry, and are asked whether they still persevere in their suits for the now dowerless princess. Burgundy, type of mere self-seeking humanity, at once renounces his claim; but the noble-minded France, showing in a word the real folly of Lear's action—"Is it but this, a tardiness in nature which often leaves the history unspoke that it intends to do?"—joyfully takes her hand; and this part of the scene terminates in the dismissal from the court of

Kent and Cordelia, the only votaries of love and honesty which it contains.

Even then Shakespeare cannot let the curtain fall without bringing into clear relief the character which he wishes the audience to attach to each of the leading figures. He has shown Lear vacillating and obstinate, unable to distinguish between words and deeds, between honesty and dishonesty. He will now show that this attitude of mind is habitual to him. This Shakespeare does by the conversation between Goneril and her sister Regan. It is expressed in prose to mark the mere business way of speaking as distinguished from the language of passion.

"*Gon.* You see how full of changes his age is . . . he always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

Reg. 'Tis the infirmity of his age: yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

Gon. The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash: then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them."

It is Goneril who takes the lead in deciding on a policy for the future.

"Pray you, let's hit together: if our father carry authority with such dispositions as he bears, this last surrender of his will but form a stumbling-block to us. . . . We must do something, and i' the heat."

The next scene (Act i. Scene 2) takes us back to what

by way of distinction may be called the "Gloucester plot."

> "Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
> My services are bound."

These words give us instantly the key to Edmund's action. He regards himself as one placed by his birth outside the pale of morality, and, like Richard III, he "is determined to prove a villain," and to revenge himself upon the society from which he is an outcast. "Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law my services are bound." It is on a soil like this that Gloucester's rash declaration, that he is as dear to him as his legitimate son, has fallen. His jealousy has been aroused, and he has determined by some trick connected with the letter he holds in his hand to displace his legitimate and elder brother Edgar and to get his land.

While Edmund with the letter in his hand is still talking to himself, his father enters. The old gentleman is musing on the events of the day.

> "Kent banished thus! and France in choler parted!
> And the king gone to-night! Subscribed his power!
> Confined to exhibition [board and lodging]! All this done
> Upon the gad!"

At sight of his father Edmund hurriedly puts away the letter, but takes care to attract his father's attention to the action. Gloucester naturally, as Edmund expected, demands to know the contents. After a slight hesitation Edmund yields, but contrives under a show of defending his brother's character to suggest suspicions of his

integrity. The letter, which Gloucester reads aloud, fully bears out Edmund's suggestions. It is addressed to Edmund himself, and purports to be written by his brother Edgar.

"This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times; keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny; who sways, not as it hath power, but as it is suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother, EDGAR."

Gloucester falls easily into the snare, though it is clear that his heart revolted against the idea of such treachery from his son Edgar. His first question is, "When came this to you? Who brought it?" "The letter was not brought," says Edgar. "There's the cunning of it; I found it thrown in at the casement of my closet." He is, however, prepared to swear to the identity of the writing; and when he repeats a few phrases alleged to be Edgar's, which exactly tally with the sentiments of the letter, the easily-gulled Gloucester falls completely into the snare. With a passion as violent as Lear's against Cordelia, and one founded on as complete a misapprehension of the truth, he shouts—

"O villain, villain! His very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain! Unnatural, detested, brutish villain!—worse than brutish! Go, sirrah, seek him; I'll apprehend him: abominable villain! Where is he?"

But such precipitation will not suit Edmund's purpose. He knows well that such anger will cool, and, like Macbeth, he fears nothing so much as an open examination of him whom he accuses. He therefore calms down his father's impetuosity, appeals to the desirability of caution, and even offers excuses for his brother, as that the letter is only a snare to test the honour of Edmund himself. Meanwhile the superstitious Gloucester readily connects both his new misfortunes and the catastrophe at court with a recent eclipse.

"These late eclipses in the sun and moon mean no good to us. . . . This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child."

He has the worst forebodings.

"We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.—Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing: do it carefully.—And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished! his offence, honesty! 'Tis strange!"

In this frame of mind he leaves the scene.

To Edmund such superstition is simply ridiculous. Not only has he no moral sense, but he has no feeling for the supernatural. He is a materialist of the most thorough-going type. We have seen how Edmund has poisoned the mind of his father against Edgar. In the conclusion of the same scene we see how he instils into Edgar a belief that his father has been offended.

Edgar is advised to keep out of Gloucester's way, to go armed, but to regard Edmund as his friend. He hurries off to take the precautions recommended, while Edmund for the benefit of the audience sums up the situation.

> "A credulous father! and a brother noble,
> Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
> That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
> My practices ride easy!"

And he concludes with the maxim of a true strategist,

> "I see the business.
> Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
> All with me's meet that I can fashion fit."

We now (Act i. Scene 3) leave the "Gloucester plot" and return to that which concerns King Lear. Some time may be supposed to have elapsed, and the king's plan has been placed on its trial. We have now to see how it worked. The scene is the Duke of Albany's palace. The actors are Goneril and her steward Oswald.

> "*Gon.* Did my father strike my gentleman for chiding of his fool?
> *Osw.* Ay, madam.
> *Gon.* By day and night he wrongs me; every hour
> He flashes into one gross crime or other,
> That sets us all at odds."

The question for the audience is whether this statement is true. Shakespeare probably intended us to take it as a fair picture of the situation. Indeed it is precisely

what might have been expected from Lear's character. To play the part which he had sketched for himself required self-constraint of no ordinary kind. Charles V undoubtedly played the *rôle* of retired sovereign with success, but he was wise enough to shut himself up in a monastery to do so. King Lear was to be in the world but not of it; to retain his pleasures while he freed himself from his responsibilities. It was an ignoble desire at the best. With a man like Lear it was not only ignoble, it was also impracticable. Even earlier than this we have seen King Lear ostentatiously divest himself of "rule, sway, execution," and a moment later we saw him banish Kent by the exercise of his royal prerogative, speaking of "our potency made good," "our place," "our dominions," just as though his abdication had never been. Had his daughters been angels, Lear was just the man to make trouble.

But Goneril is anything but an angel. She is determined to use Lear's mistakes as means to rid herself of her remaining obligations, and she gives orders to Oswald for the late king's treatment which amount to a declaration of war.

> "Put on what weary negligence you please,
> You and your fellows; I'd have it come to question:
> . . . . .
> Idle old man
> That still would manage those authorities
> That he hath given away!"

The case is one which the Roman law defined as an

"*Imperium in imperio,*" one irresponsible power exercised within the jurisdiction of another.

Up to this time we have seen the worst side of Lear's character, his fickleness, his impracticability, his imperiousness. Shakespeare now (Act i. Scene 4) introduces another trait. Lear has those who love him. The banished Kent has returned in disguise to serve the master who had wronged him. From this time the audience, led by Kent, gradually come to share his feeling for his master.

Only seven lines are taken by the episode of Kent's return in disguise, when the audience are called on to judge for themselves what sort of a guest Lear made. He has been out hunting, and on his return is doubtless hungry, but his manner is not exactly that of a visitor.

"Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go, get it ready."

Is it not easy to realise that the presence of such a guest would not improve the working of Goneril's household, or even of Cordelia's?

While Lear is waiting for his dinner Kent introduces himself, and after some parley is taken into service. He has been attracted, it seems, by something lovable in Lear's countenance. During the delay Lear's impatience for his dinner grows. "Dinner, ho, dinner!" he shouts. "Where's my knave? my fool?" The sight of Oswald still further exasperates him. One of his knights remarks that Oswald's discourtesy is only part of a general plan of neglect; and Lear's answer to this

suggestion gives us the first inkling of the generosity of character which was the true cause of Lear's hold on the affections of Kent. He may be quick-tempered but he is not suspicious, hasty but not ungenerous, swift to anger but ready to forget. There is all the difference in the world between the impulsive mistakes of Lear and the calculated wickedness of Goneril. "Thou but rememberest me," he says, "of mine own conception: I have perceived a most faint neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness: I will look further into it." Such is Lear's attitude when confronted with settled unkindness, "I will look further into it"; but face to face with the exasperating rudeness of Oswald, he has no self-control at all, and actually demeans himself to strike with his own hand his daughter's steward, who is then kicked out of the room by Kent.

A new character now comes on the scene—the fool. Shakespeare has many fools in his plays; but the fool in King Lear is different from all the rest. Shakespeare designs him to be one of those poor half-witted kindly creatures who, having once received an idea into their brain, are incapable of parting with it, but whose mental activity consists solely in harping upon the same string, sometimes with a weird ingenuity, sometimes humorously, sometimes bitterly, but calculated by continual repetition to create an impression upon those who are thrown in their company. He thus acts as a

sort of conscience, and that appears to be the chief function of the fool in *King Lear*. Up to the point of the arrival of Kent, the folly of his action in parting with his crown does not seem to have occurred to Lear at all. "A very honest-hearted fellow, and as poor as the king," says Kent. "If thou be as poor for a subject as he is for a king, thou art poor enough." It is from the speeches of Kent and the fool that the gross folly of his conduct is gradually made apparent to Lear; and it is part of Lear's punishment that whereas in the first scene he is able to banish conscience in the shape of Kent, in the later part of the play he is forced to hug remorse, in the shape of the fool, as his only companion.

The incoherent language of the fool precisely imitates the ever-repeating voice of conscience. The riddles he sets are analogous to the constant tendency of the mind to canvass again and again the actions of the past. "How now, nuncle!" says the fool. "Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters!" *Lear.* "Why, my boy?" *Fool.* "If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my coxcombs myself." *Lear.* "Dost thou call me fool?" . . . *Fool.* "All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with." Again—"Give me an egg, nuncle, and I'll give thee two crowns." *Lear.* "What two crowns shall they be?" *Fool.* "Why, after I have cut the egg i' the middle, and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg." It is by continual dropping of this kind that the true folly of his conduct becomes apparent to Lear.

In the midst of these prickings of conscience, Goneril

enters. Her face of displeasure reminds us how recently it was her part to cower when the king looked angry. Now the relations of father and daughter are reversed, and it is the fool's part to push home the moral. "Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing."

Goneril's speech is precisely what would be used to a person of no position who had presumed to make himself offensive to authority.

> "Not only, sir, this your all-licensed fool,
> But other of your insolent retinue
> Do hourly carp and quarrel; breaking forth
> In rank and not-to-be-endured riots."

Whether the accusation was true or not, and if Kent's treatment of Oswald may be taken as a specimen, there was much to be desired in the way of decorum; it was a bitter pill for Lear, so lately the imperious king, to be addressed in this tone by his daughter. He can hardly believe his senses. Can this be Goneril? Can this be Lear?

> "Doth any here know me? This is not Lear:
> Doth Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
> Are lethargied. Ha! waking? 'tis not so.
> Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

And the fool makes answer: "Lear's shadow." On the bewilderment of the old man Goneril has no pity.

She proceeds from censure to sentence. His train is to be overhauled. Half are to be dismissed; the character of the other half to be submitted to a rigid scrutiny. It is an imperial order not to be trifled with.

> "Be then desired
> By her that else will take the thing she begs,
> A little to disquantity your train;
> And the remainder, that shall still depend,
> To be such men as may besort your age,
> And know themselves and you."

To hear such language, the very words of which are those he would have used himself in his most imperious days, was more than Lear can bear. It is the reversal of the relations of father and child, the very arrangement which he had made himself, which makes the bitterness of his cup; and with a violence equal to that which he had shown against Cordelia, but far more to be justified, he curses his daughter. Barren may she be, or if she bears, "turn all her mother's pains and benefits to laughter and contempt; that she may feel how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Exhausted with the effort, Lear flings himself away only to find that Goneril has, even before speaking to him, carried her threat into action. Fifty of his followers are gone.

Despairing of Goneril, Lear now determines to change his residence to the house of his younger daughter Regan. She will receive him, and with her aid he will resume his power. He writes to Gloucester,

and sends Kent with the letters. But Goneril has been as quick as he, and her messenger Oswald, bearing her version of the affair, is already on his way.

We now leave the sense of his misfortunes to work upon Lear. His mind, never well poised, "he hath ever but slenderly known himself," is now far over-strained. In being subjected to the tyranny of Goneril the imperious man has been placed under the severest of trials, that of being compelled to take from another the exact treatment which it was his wont to use to others. Already the sense of helplessness under tyranny is beginning to tell on his mind."

> "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
> Keep me in temper: I would not be mad."

In Act ii. Scene 1 we go back to the "Gloucester plot," and we find Edmund in the Earl of Gloucester's castle. He has just received from a courtier the news that Cornwall and Regan are coming to stay with his father. He learns too that war between Cornwall and Albany is not unlikely. So much for Lear's anticipation "that future strife may be prevented" by his surrender of power. To Edmund this news is of importance. He sees at a glance how it may be utilised to further his own machinations, and his words are those of a skilful general. "This weaves itself perforce into my business," and he proceeds without hesitation to make use of the new development.

It appears from Edmund's words that his easy-going

father, fully persuaded of the authenticity of Edgar's alleged letter, has set a guard to take him. Edmund decides to use the information he has heard to compel Edgar to fly, and so, as in the case of Donalbain and Malcolm, to colour the suspicion of his guilt. With marvellous cunning he suggests to Edgar that something he has spoken against the Duke of Cornwall is the cause of the intended visit, which can only be meant to arrest him. While Edgar hesitates incredulous, Edmund urges flight, and at the sound of his father's approach Edmund draws his sword. In whispers he adjures his brother to fly, while in his loudest tones he shouts for assistance; and the moment Edgar's back is turned he draws blood from his own arm in order to support a lying fable that he had been wounded in defending himself from an attempted assassination. Monstrous as the plot is, it succeeds. Gloucester is completely bewildered and cajoled. He believes to the full Edmund's story that Edgar had followed up the letter by personal solicitations to parricide, and that finding his good brother impervious to his wiles, Edgar has tried to conceal his attempt by murder. Gloucester's first idea is to capture the villain, the next to reward Edmund by making him his legitimate heir.

With equal ingenuity Edmund commends himself to Cornwall and Regan by the assumed modesty of his behaviour. He shields his horrid insinuation that Edgar was a companion of the riotous knights who accompanied King Lear by a quiet and reserved admis-

sion of the fact. In answer to compliments on his zeal he answers simply, "'Twas my duty, sir." He is rewarded by a special invitation to enter himself among the Cornwall faction.

Meanwhile the messengers of Goneril and Lear, who have come on after Regan, meet outside the house (Act ii. Scene 2), and the personal contest between Oswald and Kent which had begun when they last met was continued. Oswald is meant by Shakespeare to be a contemptible character. As Kent is the conscience of Lear, so Oswald performs the same office for Goneril; but his is a lying spirit, and instead of being a check on his mistress, he is the stimulator of her worst actions, just the man to make and maintain mischief.

> "Such smiling rogues as these,
> Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain
> Which are too intrinse t' unloose; smooth every passion
> That in the natures of their lords rebel;
> Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
> Renege, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
> With every gale and vary of their masters,
> Knowing nought, like dogs, but following."

The natural result of such a disgraceful bout of fisticuffs is that Kent, who was certainly in this case the aggressor, is placed in the stocks.

We then get two little incidents which are designed to help on the plot. While in the stocks Kent drops a hint that he is in communication with Cordelia, and Edgar appears on the stage disguised as a mad

beggar (Act ii. Scene 3). While Kent is yet in the stocks (Act ii. Scene 4) Lear arrives at the castle. The fool alone is with him. Of his hundred knights faithful is found not one. As yet he has nothing but confidence in the kindliness of Regan's intentions. There must have been something about Regan's appearance which gave a guarantee of good feeling. The discovery of his insulted servant gives the first shock to Lear's belief in her.

> "They durst not do it;
> They could not, would not do it; 'tis worse than murder,
> To do upon respect such violent outrage:
> Resolve me, with all modest haste, which way
> Thou might'st deserve, or they impose, this usage,
> Coming from us."

Kent's insults Lear takes as done to himself; disrespect of such a character was exactly of a kind to appeal to all the feelings of pride which remained in an imperious man. A moment later he learns that it is no casual misunderstanding. Regan is acting in concert with her sister Goneril. Her messenger had poisoned their hearts against his, and more bitter still, it was the saucy steward who had been preferred to his own ambassador. This is ill news. As the fool puts it, "Winter's not gone yet, if the wild geese fly that way."

At the news Lear's pent-up passion, all the stronger for the disappointment of his hopes of welcome, wells up in his heart; but he determines to try the effect of a personal interview. It cannot be that Regan will

scorn her father. While he is gone the fool sums up the case. He is a foolish man who holds to a falling master. Kent asks, "How chance the king comes with so small a train?" "Let go thy hold," says the fool, "when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following it; but the great one that goes up the hill, let him draw thee after.'

> "That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
> And follows but for form,
> Will pack when it begins to rain,
> And leave thee in the storm."

The worldly wisdom of the fool's speech is shown when Lear returns. The last insult has been done to fallen majesty. He has been denied admittance. He who less than a month ago was an absolute and imperious sovereign is now turned away from the door by his own daughter. He has been told "they are sick, they are weary," and the excuse made by Gloucester only makes things worse.

> "My dear lord,
> You know the fiery quality of the duke;
> How unremovable and fixed he is
> In his own course."

What? For Lear to be told this! To have flung in his teeth as a consolation the very excuse by which the victims of his own violence, Cordelia and Kent, had had to solace themselves! Must not his own words, "The bow is bent . . . make from the shaft," have

risen up to plague him? Who is this who like himself dares to speak of being "unremovable and fixed"?

Yet even in his despair Lear is learning control, and in his outburst of wrath he checks himself before proceeding to extremity. It may be that the excuse is true.

> "No, but not yet: maybe he is not well:
> Infirmity doth still neglect all office
> Whereto our health is bound; we are not ourselves
> When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind
> To suffer with the body: I'll forbear."

At this moment his eye catches sight of the insulted Kent. In an instant his resolution is gone, and with a revival of his old energy, he alters his tone from supplication to command.

> "Give me my servant forth.
> Go tell the duke and 's wife I'd speak with them,
> Now, presently: bid them come forth and hear me,
> Or at their chamber-door I'll beat the drum,
> Till it cry sleep to death."

Gloucester determines to play the peacemaker. He hurries out, and seemingly succeeds, for a moment later he returns with Cornwall, Regan, and their train. Lear falls back on his previous theory that after all Regan will be kind, and he appeals to her for aid against her sister's cruelty. He little knew the stony heart to which he addressed himself. Regan is a thorough partisan of Goneril. In every complaint

that Lear suggests she takes her side and advances her excuse. Still Lear clings to his remaining daughter.

> "No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse:
> Thy tender-hefted nature shall not give
> Thee o'er to harshness: her eyes are fierce; but thine
> Do comfort and not burn. 'Tis not in thee
> To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
> To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes,
> And in conclusion to oppose the bolt
> Against my coming in: thou better know'st
> The offices of nature, bond of childhood,
> Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude;
> Thy half o' the kingdom hast thou not forgot,
> Wherein I thee endowed."

Not a jot does Regan stir. She only answers, "Good sir, to the purpose." A trumpet sounds the approach of Goneril, and Lear's last hope is gone when he sees Regan take her sister by the hand. A moment later he hears his younger daughter order him to kneel to the elder, to beg of her the favour of a home. A broken man, he implores to stay with Regan. She, he hopes, will receive him; but she will not. Crueller even than Goneril, every word of hers stings him to the quick "I pray you, father, being weak, seem so."

> "Give ear, sir, to my sister;
> For those that mingle reason with your passion
> Must be content to think you old, and so—
> But she knows what she does."

At last her cruel words beat out of Lear his last hope. Poor, broken, despairing, he turns to Goneril again.

"Those wicked creatures yet do look well favoured.
When others are more wicked, not being the worst,
Stands in some rank of praise.
[*To Goneril.*
I'll go with thee;
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

Gon. Hear me, my lord;
What need you five and twenty, ten, or five,
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

Regan. What need one?"

And Lear answers,

"O, reason not the need . our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
. . . . .
But for true need,—
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!"

Three times already such a storm of passion has come over Lear that he has felt his wits turning, and now in his effort to control himself he again feels insanity creeping over him. "O fool, I shall go mad!" and with these words he rushes out into the pitiless storm, while his daughters shelter themselves within. No circumstance which can accentuate their cruelty is wanting. "Alack," says Gloucester, "the night comes on, and the bleak winds do sorely ruffle; for many miles about there's scarce a bush." Again it is Regan to give the bitterest counsel.

"O, sir, to wilful men,
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters."

And so the act closes.

Part II

At the conclusion of the last scene the evil-doers have, in a certain sense, done their worst. Goneril and Regan, to whom their father's rashness had committed his fortunes, have misused his generosity to the full. From stinting his sizes and disquantitying his train, they have now thrust him out of doors to face alone the elements of nature. Edmund too has succeeded. He has become his father's heir, while his brother, like Lear, is an outcast. So far the powers of evil have been in the ascendant. How long is this to continue? The answer to this question is the subject of our further investigation.

The opening of the next scene (Act iii. Scene 1) takes us a step further in unravelling the plot. News has reached Kent that France, of which country Cordelia is now queen, is about to take advantage of the distracted state of Britain to land an invading force; and he is shown in the act of sending a gentleman to Dover to describe to the invaders the true condition of Lear. Forces are gathering which may yet revenge his wrongs.

Meanwhile (Act iii. Scene 2) Lear is buffeting with

the elements. His passion rises in unison with the conflict around him. His curses become more passionate, his language more exalted, his denunciation of crime more terrible. In himself "he is a man more sinned against than sinning." In this condition Kent finds him and his last attendant the fool, and implores him to take refuge in a neighbouring outhouse or hovel, as it is still called in Warwickshire.

With great difficulty (Act iii. Scene 4) Kent induces Lear to enter, but what Kent had meant for his care turns to be the last stroke at Lear's sanity. For from this hovel issues Edgar, Gloucester's son, who had been forced to adopt the disguise of a madman to escape the vengeance of his father. The appearance of what Lear takes to be a real madman completes what the cruelty of his daughters had begun. Lear's mind is completely unhinged, and he passes from the stage of furious passion into that of childish imbecility. The sight of Edgar's nakedness seems to carry Lear back to the thought of "needs"; he too will free himself from all superfluities, and he tears off his clothes. He takes Edgar for Diogenes, the Athenian philosopher. Then (Act iii. Scene 6) he determines to arraign his daughters, and makes Edgar and the fool the judges. Finally, he enlists Edgar as one of his bodyguard.

But while Lear has ceased to be able to do anything for himself, others are working for him. Kent and the fool have never ceased their attendance, and now Gloucester affected by a letter he had received which

gave news of the French invasion, has come over to take his part. A litter has been prepared, and ere morning he is on his way to Dover. It appears that having suffered the extremity of ill from the daughters he had favoured, he has to cast himself on the mercy of her whom he had wronged.

We must now go back to the "Gloucester plot." Gloucester has been thoroughly scandalised by the cruelty of the king's treatment, the enormity of which has been made the more obvious by having been enacted at the door of his own castle. His first impulse is to take his son Edmund into his confidence, and accordingly (Act iii. Scene 3) he discloses his discontent. Edmund falls in with his views. "Most savage and unnatural" is his opinion. On this Gloucester still further explains.

"Go to; say you nothing. There's a division between the dukes; and a worse matter than that: I have received a letter this night; 'tis dangerous to be spoken; I have locked the letter in my closet: these injuries the king now bears will be revenged home; there's part of a power already footed; we must incline to the king."

Accordingly he goes out to Lear's assistance, and, as we saw, arranged for his conveyance to Dover.

This, however, was not the only effect of his interference. While attending to Lear's wants (Act iii. Scene 4) he is brought, but without knowing it, face to face with his own innocent and injured son Edgar; and whilst there had given vent to words which for the

first time showed Edgar how his father had been abused. Shocked with Lear's growing insanity, Gloucester had exclaimed,

> "I'll tell thee, friend,
> I am almost mad myself: I had a son,
> Now outlawed from my blood; he sought my life,
> But lately, very late: I loved him, friend;
> No father his son dearer: truth to tell thee,
> The grief hath crazed my wits."

From that moment Edgar's anger against his father is turned to pity.

Meanwhile the wickedness of Gloucester's other son has found a new field. Without the slightest hesitation he determines to use his father's confidence to advance himself a step further (Act iii. Scene 3). By his treachery to Edgar he has become the heir of Gloucester; by betraying the confidence of his father he will become Gloucester himself.

> "This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the duke
> Instantly know; and of that letter too:
> This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me
> That which my father loses; no less than all:
> The younger rises when the old doth fall."

Accordingly, while his father is away on his errand of mercy, Edmund (Act iii. Scene 5) hurries to the Duke of Cornwall, and contrives to place his father's conduct in such an odious light that we find Cornwall saying, "I will have my revenge ere I depart his house." With repulsive hypocrisy Edmund pretends to regret

the necessity which makes him the betrayer of his father's treason, while he is really planning to make it appear deeper. "How malicious is my fortune," he says, "that I must repent to be just!" As his reward he is to be Earl of Gloucester. Losing a father, he is to find a dearer one in Cornwall. From this moment the action of the play becomes exceedingly rapid. In Act iii. Scene 7 Goneril, with Edmund as her escort, is at once despatched to rouse her husband Albany with the news of the French landing. Cornwall and Regan are left to do execution on Gloucester. Circumstances aggravate his guilt. Oswald brings news that he has conveyed the king hence, and that some five-and-twenty of the king's knights, ready enough to help now that fortune is turning his way, are gone with him towards Dover. Gloucester is brought in bound. It is Regan's part to brand him as a traitor. It is she who plucks his beard. Confronted with the proofs of his treason Gloucester turns to bay, and it is from his mouth, as the uniting link between the two plots, that Regan hears the first condemnation of her atrocious cruelty.

Furious at Gloucester's taunts, Cornwall hurries on the execution of his revenge. His eyes are to be plucked out. One has already gone, when one even of Cornwall's servants relents, and the first note of revenge is struck when Cornwall receives his death-wound from a menial's sword. It is too late, however, to save Gloucester. His other eye fares like its fellow, and

when in sore distress Gloucester calls upon his son Edmund for revenge, it is Regan's answer,

> "Out, treacherous villain!
> Thou call'st on him that hates thee: it was he
> That made the overture of thy treasons to us;
> Who is too good to pity thee."

In that bitter moment Gloucester learns the depths of his own infatuation.

> "O my follies! then Edgar was abused.
> Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!"

The opening of Edgar's mind to his father's innocence, and Gloucester's terrible awakening to his own folly, prepare us for the next scene (Act iv. Scene 1), where Edgar is selected by some of Cornwall's servants to act as guide to his poor sightless father as far as Dover. Of course they are unaware of the Bedlam's real personality, and so long as observers are present Edgar still keeps up the deceit. When alone it is gradually dropped. Gloucester's wants are simple enough. A guide to Dover cliff is his only need. "From that place I shall no leading need"; and under the guidance of his son he sets out.

We now (Act iv. Scene 2) return to the main plot. Gloucester, who has hitherto been the connecting link between the two, is now gone to Dover and his place is taken by Edmund, who, it will be remembered, was sent by Cornwall as escort to Goneril. On the way

Edmund has been making adulterous love to her, and the audience are bidden to note the new step which Edmund's ambition has driven him to take. Goneril plainly prefers him to Albany, whose manhood she despises. "Oh, the difference of man and man! To thee a woman's services are due: my fool usurps my body."

This scene brings into question the character of Albany. So far he has been passive. The original favourite of Lear, he had in the disposition of the state been made the equal of Cornwall. In the company of his wife he had been the passive witness of her insolence to her father, but he had taken no part in active cruelty, and had stayed at home when Goneril pursued her father to Regan's court. But in his wife's absence he was a changed man. Oswald, to his evident surprise, found that he was capable of taking a line of his own (Act iv. Scene 2).

> "I told him of the army that was landed;
> He smiled at it: I told him you were coming;
> His answer was, 'The worse': of Gloucester's treachery,
> And of the loyal service of his son,
> When I informed him, then he called me sot,
> And told me I had turned the wrong side out."

His wife arrived, Albany overwhelms her with abuse; she retaliates, and nothing but her woman's shape restrains him from actual violence. In the midst of the altercation a messenger announces the death of Cornwall, and the cruel loss of Gloucester's eyes.

To husband and wife the news gives very different emotions. Goneril, already jealous of Edmund, is horrified at the thought that Regan is now free to marry, and she can imagine no other husband for her but Edmund. To Albany the most striking fact is the detestable treachery of Edmund.

> "Gloucester, I live
> To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the king,
> And to revenge thine eyes."

While Goneril and Albany are making their preparations, the audience are asked to give their attention to the French camp (Act iv. Scene 3). Hardly has the French king landed than he has seen good to return. Why? Because Shakespeare would have found his presence awkward. He did not wish to draw attention to a French invasion, but to the return of Cordelia. The king gone, Cordelia is the leading figure; had he remained he must have occupied the first place. As it is, he has only left a marshal, M. le Fer, who will cause no embarrassment.

It is Shakespeare's aim to exhibit as strongly as he could the character of Cordelia. Up to this time the points to which our attention has been drawn have been her honesty and firmness, and her truth in action. She is noble, but she may be hard. Hitherto her virtues have been Roman; can she add English tenderness as well? Shakespeare's answer is given in this scene, where, in a conversation between Kent and the gentle-

man who had acted as his messenger, he paints the combination of tenderness and fortitude with which Cordelia had received the tidings of her father's treatment. Even Kent is doubtful of her tenderness.

"*Kent.* Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?

Gent. Ay, sir; she took them, read them in my presence;
And now and then an ample tear trilled down
Her delicate cheek: it seemed she was a queen
Over her passion; who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.

Kent. O, then it moved her.

Gent. Not to a rage: patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
Were like a better way; those happy smilets,
That played on her ripe lip, seemed not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropped. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved,
If all could so become it."

In this description Shakespeare seems to paint for us a truly well-balanced nature, one that can maintain its equipoise against the two most powerful of passions, pity and anger; a true queen. Perhaps it is some faint consciousness of this which makes Lear unwilling to face her. This hesitation on his part is a touch very true to nature. It is always harder to ask forgiveness than to grant it. The longer the interview is put off the more Lear realises the enormity of his folly, and at length he escapes from his guards and wanders off alone

(Act iv. Scene 4). His madness is now the innocence of childhood. Like Ophelia, he crowns himself with flowers.

By this time the British forces are gathering (Act iv. Scene 5). Though seemingly one, there is jealousy within. In combination to ill-treat their father Regan and Goneril have hit together well enough; but now Edmund has come between them, and their rivalry begins. Neither is happy when he has access to the other.

Meanwhile by slow and dubious steps the blind Gloucester, under the guardianship of his disguised son Edgar, has made his way to Dover (Act iv. Scene 6), and in fancy has thrown himself from the cliff. In reality he has not approached the brink of the precipice at all, but has been made by Edgar to imagine to himself all the circumstances of suicide, and of rescue from what he believed to be an inevitable death.

The next scenes appear to be somewhat prolix. The main actions are the contests between the rival armies for victory, and between the rival queens for the possession of Edmund. Incidentally we carry a step further the story of Lear's recovery. Though better, Lear can never be well.

> "Pray, do not mock me:
> I am a very foolish fond old man,
> Fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less;
> And, to deal plainly,
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind."

This appeal to the pity of the audience completes the wheel of fortune's turn. From imperiousness to madness, from madness to helplessness, has been the course of Lear.

While Lear has been restored to reason and to his injured daughter, Gloucester is made known to his equally abused son. Oswald, the servile steward of Goneril, finds Gloucester, and thinks to win reward by his death. Edgar interposes and slays the wretch, and searching for despatches, finds a letter from Goneril to Edmund which puts it in his power to open the eyes of Albany to what is going on; for the letter distinctly suggests that advantage should be taken of the confusion of the battle to effect her husband's slaughter. Goneril assumes that she has won Edmund's affection. Act v. Scene 1 shows us that such is not the case, or at any rate that Edmund is quite capable of making believe to love Regan.

The next incident is the fight, and the question arises what attitude Shakespeare will take in this matter. There are two courses open. If the French win, the susceptibilities of an English audience will be outraged. If they lose, how can the catastrophe be brought about, and especially how can a defeat of Cordelia's forces be reconciled with the justice of her cause? The answer is simple. Cordelia's forces have no business on English soil. Were Lear a prisoner in the hands of his daughters French interference might perhaps have been justified; but he is not. The moment Lear had been rescued

Cordelia's true course was to retire. It was not her business to effect a French conquest of the island. Nor was it needful to effect the catastrophe. Between the dukes civil war was inevitable. From that an adequate punishment might be reckoned on to arise; as it was, Shakespeare could never have allowed the British army to be beaten by an invading force.

On the eve of the battle Edgar places a packet in Albany's hands. It is Goneril's letter to Edmund. The battle results in the defeat of the French forces (Act v. Scene 2). Lear and Cordelia are prisoners (Act v. Scene 3). From a remark of Edmund's we are aware that Albany will treat them well but that Edmund means their destruction. In adversity as in prosperity Cordelia preserves the serenity of her mind. Her thoughts are on her father.

> "We are not the first
> Who, with best meaning, have incurred the worst,
> For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
> Myself could else out-frown false fortune's frown."

As for Lear, another relapse has deprived him of any real knowledge of his situation. So long as he may be with his recovered Cordelia he can be happy, even in a prison.

> "Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage."

The trial, however, will not be long, for Edmund is ready with arrangements for their massacre. His one anxiety is to put off Albany's design for their

welfare till his own plans have been carried out. The demand of Albany for the prisoners produces an altercation, and brings to a head the rivalry of Regan and Goneril. Even in the presence of her husband Goneril contests with Regan the possession of Edmund; and she has taken means to secure her claim. Regan complains of sickness. Can it be that she has been poisoned by her rival?

Now is the time for Albany to act. With a vigour with which the audience can hardly credit him he denounces Edmund's treasons and his wife's infidelities. With bitter irony he shows that he knows the full measure of their crimes.

> "Edmund, I arrest thee
> On capital treason; and, in thine attaint,
> This gilded serpent [*pointing to Goneril*]. For your claim, fair sister,
> I bar it in the interest of my wife;
> 'Tis she is sub-contracted to this lord,
> And I, her husband, contradict your banns."

Nay more, in default of other champion he will himself prove on Edmund's body the treasons of which he is accused. The scene is terrible. Regan is sick unto death. With hungry eyes Goneril watches the progress of her disease. Edmund and Albany are nerving themselves for the conflict. The moment foreseen by Albany has arrived.

> "If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,

'Twill come, humanity must prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep."

But who is the champion? It is Edgar himself, and as the herald's trumpet sounds a third time he enters the lists. In answer to the herald's formal question he denounces Edmund's crimes.

"Thou art a traitor,
False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father;
Conspirant 'gainst this high-illustrious prince;
And, from the extremest upward of thy head
To the descent and dust below thy foot,
A most toad-spotted traitor."

Hitherto villainy has been the only note in Edmund's character. But Shakespeare is too true an artist to paint a character of one self-hue. As Porson, I believe, remarked, "Every villain must have something by which he can justify his actions to himself." We could imagine artists who at this moment would have made Edmund collapse. Shakespeare does nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he draws attention to a certain chivalry in Edmund's nature. By the law of arms he was not bound to fight a nameless champion. Of this plea a coward nature would have availed itself; but Edmund was no coward. He disdains to take advantage of a quibble. His adversary is knightly, and that is enough.

"In wisdom I should ask thy name;
But, since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,

And that thy tongue some say of breeding breathes,
What safe and nicely I might well delay
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn :
Back do I toss these treasons to thy head ;
With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart ;
Which, for they yet glance by and scarcely bruise,
This sword of mine shall give them instant way,
Where they shall rest for ever."

They fight and Edmund falls. Goneril in despair accuses all of treachery ; but the production of her letter to Edmund, and the knowledge that all her wickedness is known, changes her indignation to despair, and she hurriedly quits the stage. While she is absent the identity of Edgar with the unknown champion is revealed. By shifting into a madman's rags he has escaped the bloody proclamation against his life. He has learned the miseries of his father by nursing them ; to whom the revelation of his true character was more than his age could bear.

" His flawed heart,
Alack, too weak the conflict to support !
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly."

This speech must have been placed in Edgar's mouth for the sake of its effect on Edmund, for except the circumstance of Gloucester's death it tells nothing with which the audience are not already acquainted ; and that is its effect.

"*Edmund.* This speech of yours hath moved me,
And shall perchance do good: but speak you on;
You look as you had something more to say."

Edgar then tells of his interview with Kent, from whom he had first learned in detail the story of his father's wrongs; and relates how Kent's grief, moved by the violence of his emotion in telling the tale,

"grew puissant, and the strings of life
Began to crack: twice then the trumpets sounded,
And there I left him tranced."

Horror succeeds on horror. A servant rushes in with a bloody knife just snatched from the heart of Goneril. Regan is already dead of her poison. Overwhelmed as he is with horror at the accumulation of ghastly discoveries, Lear and Cordelia have passed from Albany's thought. They are recalled to him by the entrance of Kent, who comes

"To bid my king and master aye good night:
Is he not here."

While Albany and Kent speak, the better nature of Edmund, touched first by Edgar's speech, is having time to assert itself. The feeling that after all he was beloved recalls some of the instinct of humanity to the dying man.

"Yet Edmund was beloved:
The one the other poisoned for my sake,
And after slew herself.
. . . . . .

I pant for life: some good I mean to do,
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
Be brief in it, to the castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia:
Nay, send in time."

It is Edgar who has his wits about him at this supreme crisis. Everything depends on haste and certainty. It is he who suggests that Edmund's sword should go as a token of authority. It is he whose question elicits from Edmund the agent of his villainy.

"*Edmund.* Well thought on: take my sword,
Give it the captain.

. . . . . .

He hath commission from thy wife and me
To hang Cordelia in the prison, and
To lay the blame upon her own despair,
That she fordid herself."

It is hardly possible to imagine an audience that, seeing this play for the first time, must not have longed that the messenger might be in time, that the pure-minded, noble, unselfish daughter might have lived to tend the old age of her father. But Shakespeare thought otherwise. He was determined to show that the crimes of criminals and the mistakes of fools involve not only themselves but also the innocent. For that reason dramatic exigency required that Cordelia should not live.

Edmund's repentance has been too late. Edgar has only been in time to meet Lear dragging in his

arms Cordelia's corpse. She is dead past hope of recovery. Lear too is mad. The paroxysm of fury in which he killed the slave that was hanging Cordelia has bereft him of his wits. He knows neither Albany nor Kent. He cannot receive the intelligence of Goneril's and of Regan's end.

> "He knows not what he says: and vain it is
> That we present us to him."

One scene more is needed. Edmund has gone too. Lear is dead. "He hates him much that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer." Kent feels that the world is no longer for him. Albany and Edgar alone remain, and on them devolves the ordering of the distracted state.

If we analyse the plot of *King Lear* we shall see that there are three actions involved. (1) That by which Goneril and Regan drive their father mad, an action which begins with Lear's impolitic division and ends with his madness. (2) That by which Edmund carries through his series of crimes, beginning with the disinheriting of Edgar and culminating in the murder of Cordelia. (3) The action by which Goneril and Regan, who, having been allies during the first half of the play, destroy one another during the second. During the first half of the play the two former plots are wholly disconnected in action, though they are exactly analogous in moral.

The characters are so arranged as to be the exact

counterparts of one another. In the first action the central character is Lear—imperious, suspicious, passionate: in the second, Gloucester—voluptuous, unsuspecting, easy-going. By the side of Lear stand Goneril and Regan — hypocritical, ungrateful, cruel: by that of Gloucester, Edmund—hypocritical, ungrateful, but not cruel, only void of moral sense; of a higher intellectual type. Lear's other daughter is Cordelia, honest, grateful, tender, as Gloucester's son Edgar is honest, grateful, chivalrous. The only other important characters are themselves opposites. Kent represents the honest servant conscience, spurned by his master; Oswald, the sneaking favourer of his mistress's vices. Cornwall depicts violence linked to a violent wife; Albany, passive goodness linked to active iniquity.

In the first story Lear, entirely by his own fault, is taken in by his two elder daughters, so that he heaps on them undeserved riches and power, while he banishes his true daughter Cordelia. Thus he drives away tenderness while he places himself unreservedly in the hands of cruelty. In the second story a hypocritical son, in whom envy has been excited by his father's ill-judged speeches, abuses the confidence of that father to the ruin of his honest brother. So that Lear has favoured Goneril and Regan and ill used Cordelia, exactly as Gloucester has banished Edgar and taken Edmund to his heart. In the second step, Lear's impolitic action puts him in the power of Goneril and Regan, who abuse their trust, precisely as Gloucester's

ill-judging confidence in Edmund is the cause of his own betrayal. Furthermore, the conduct of Goneril and Regan results in Lear's losing his mental vision; that of Edmund in Gloucester's losing his natural eyes.

Again, in his misery Lear is tended by his injured daughter Cordelia; Gloucester by his injured son Edgar. Kent disguises himself as a servant; Edgar as a madman. Lastly, in the third plot, the place of Gloucester, who has acted as link between the two stories, is taken by Edmund, whose story henceforth becomes one with that of Goneril and Regan. It is his introduction into the court circle which breeds the rivalry between Goneril and Regan that results in their destruction.

Such a series of unnatural crimes requires a holocaust to expiate it. Guilty and guiltless are alike dragged down to the grave. As in *Hamlet*, destruction falls alike on him who has committed a sin and her who has made a mistake. Edgar and Albany, like Horatio and Fortinbras, alone survive, sadder but wiser men, to undertake the task of reorganising and calming a distracted world.

RICHARD II

Part I

In dramatising English history, Shakespeare made the assumption that the general outline of events was known to his audience; but as we live in days separated from the incidents with which he dealt by a far larger gap than his were, we shall do well to consider briefly the circumstances which preceded the opening of the play.

The reign of Richard II had from its very commencement been a time of trouble. The usual causes of disaffection were present in unusual profusion. The discontent of the peasantry was shown by the revolt of Wat the Tyler; the turbulence of the nobles by numerous outrages and quarrels; and the whole was complicated by the addiction of the king to favourites, and by his indulgence in an extravagance unprecedented since the days of Edward II. In these troubles the leading part was played by the king's uncle, Thomas Duke of Gloucester; Henry of Bolingbroke, the son of

John of Gaunt; the Earl of Arundel; and Thomas Mowbray, afterwards Duke of Norfolk. These noblemen acted together in 1388 against the king's favourites, and put themselves forward as the opponents of the king's policy of peace with France. At this date they were completely successful, but nine years later Richard had his revenge. With considerable cunning he made friends with John of Gaunt, secured the neutrality of Bolingbroke, and winning the active co-operation of Mowbray, carried out a *coup d'état* against Arundel and Gloucester. Arundel was tried and executed, but when the person of Thomas of Gloucester, who had been committed to gaol at Calais, was called for, it was announced that he had died in prison. Popular belief of course settled that he had been murdered, and divided the guilt between the king and Mowbray, who was governor of the town and castle of Calais. At the time, however, not a finger was stirred, and so completely had Richard destroyed the opposition that he induced the Shrewsbury Parliament to make him virtually absolute. It was at this date that the events on which Shakespeare based his play occurred. The old associates Mowbray and Bolingbroke quarrelled, and Bolingbroke accused Mowbray of treason. The crisis was exceedingly serious, for Mowbray was the keeper of the secret of Gloucester's death, while Bolingbroke was known to be a man of great ability and ambition, whose hopes of succession to the crown had been balked by the proclamation as heir of Roger Mortimer, the grandson

of the Duke of Clarence. As no one knew the details of the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray—for there had been no witnesses of its occurrence—Bolingbroke was ordered to lay the matter before Parliament. This was done, and in February 1398 the two dukes met in Richard's presence. Here Shakespeare's play opens.

In Act i. Scene 1 we find King Richard and his uncle John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, in friendly but serious conversation. It seems that the duke has been surety for the appearance of his son Henry of Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, who has appealed or solemnly accused of treachery another nobleman, Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, and that he has brought him with him to the court. The very first speech of Richard, as is so often the case with Shakespeare's heroes, is designed to give us the key to his character. It is dignified and courteous, friendly but not familiar, the speech of a man who knew what was fitting both to himself and to others, but it is not that of a strong man. There is an air of complaint about the word "boisterous," and a confession of unbusiness-like habits in the phrase "which then our leisure would not let us hear," that at once betrays the inherent weakness of his character. It is clear too that he is uneasy, and that both he and Gaunt feel that in dealing with Hereford they have to do with a man of stronger character than themselves.

> "Tell me, moreover, hast thou sounded him,
> If he appeal the duke on ancient malice ;

Or worthily, as a good subject should,
On some known ground of treachery in him?"

Gaunt's answer, though expressed with some hesitation, is reassuring.

"As near as I could sift him on that argument,—
On some apparent danger seen in him,
Aimed at your highness, no inveterate malice."

Richard's mind is relieved, and he gives orders that the dukes shall be brought before him.

On their arrival, the difference between their characters is at once apparent. Bolingbroke takes the initiative. His address to the king is formal, polite, studied, and is evidently that of a man who weighed his words; but when he comes to address Mowbray his manner, though not less artificial, undergoes a complete change. It is clear that he wishes to drive Norfolk to an extremity of passion. First he treats him with insolent swagger.

"Thou art a traitor, and a miscreant;
Too good to be so, and too bad to live;
. . . . . .
Once more, the more to aggravate the note,
With a foul traitor's name stuff I thy throat."

Mowbray, however, keeps his temper in control, and excusing himself from speaking his mind on the ground of Bolingbroke's relationship to the king, confines himself to a statement that the accusation is false. Bolingbroke then tries the effect of a taunt of cowardice, but Mowbray merely repeats his readiness to fight. So far

Mowbray has appeared distinctly to the greater advantage, and Richard, satisfied with the turn affairs are taking, asks Bolingbroke to make his charges in specific terms.

Bolingbroke's accusation, however, turns out to be something quite different from what John of Gaunt had led the king to expect. Instead of being "some apparent danger seen in him, aimed at your highness," it is made up of a charge of embezzlement, a vague accusation of having been a leader in the plots and conspiracies of the last eighteen years—which was equally true of the man who made it—and concludes with an assertion that the Duke of Norfolk was the murderer of the Duke of Gloucester.

We have now before us a very curious scene. The man who had really been responsible for Gloucester's death was not Norfolk but Richard himself, as Shakespeare might assume was known to his audience. Consequently of the four chief actors, Gaunt, as we see a moment later, knew the king's guilt; Bolingbroke knew it, and was now striking at Richard through Norfolk; Norfolk knew it, but was too loyal to defend himself by throwing the blame on the true murderer; and Richard was of course conscious of his own guilt.

"How high a pitch his resolution soars!" is the half-muttered aside of the king. Before all things, however, he must keep up his show of impartiality, and he solemnly calls on Mowbray for his answer. Mowbray's reply is honest and fearless. The embezzlement he

wholly explains. Of the murder of the duke he accepts just so much responsibility that being governor of Calais, he had not guarded his prisoner with greater care. He even goes out of his way to confess a conspiracy against John of Gaunt which did not form part of the indictment, and summing up the rest of the charge under the general heading of "the rancour of a villain," he hurls down his glove at the foot of his accuser.

Richard's great object now is to find some method of bringing the scene to an end. Will not his royal authority, backed by what he calls "the unstooping firmness of my upright soul," be sufficient to keep the peace? No, indeed. Neither will give way. Parental reproof has no more effect on Bolingbroke than the royal orders have on Mowbray, and the man "who was not born to sue but to command" finds that only moral force can secure unquestioning obedience. Each moment the anger of the rivals becomes fiercer; Gaunt leaves the scene, and Richard, much against his will, is obliged to order the quarrel to be settled by a judicial combat in the lists at Coventry. A high sense of the outward dignity of kingship without either moral rectitude or force of character appears so far to be the characteristic of the king, and that at a time when the tempestuous and ungovernable jealousy of his barons made a sovereign of uprightness and vigour absolutely essential to the preservation of the peace of the realm.

The next scene (Act i. Scene 2) opens with a dialogue

between John of Gaunt and the widow of the murdered Gloucester. Mowbray's simple defence had allowed the murder to fall into the background, so Shakespeare, who wished to impress on the audience the fact of Richard's guilt, and the enormity of the murder of a relative, uses the mouth of the duchess to paint the full horror of the deed. Nor are any of the audience allowed to remain in doubt for a moment as to who is its author. Cautiously and then boldly John of Gaunt points to the king, first when he says,

> "But, since correction lieth in those hands,
> Which made the fault which we cannot correct;"

and later,

> "Heaven's is the quarrel; for heaven's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in his sight,
> Hath caused his death."

But at the same time, when Shakespeare brands Richard as a man, he is careful to reserve the respect due to the office.

> "The which if wrongfully,
> Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
> An angry arm against his minister."

At the same time it is made clear that Mowbray is also held responsible; and supposing, as Bishop Stubbs puts it, that "if Gloucester was murdered, the guilt must be divided between Norfolk and the king," it is clear that the duchess was not far wrong.

The scene next shifts to Coventry (Act i. Scene 3), where the lists have been prepared for the fight. Nothing is omitted which can lend solemnity to the occasion. The point of special note is the difference between Richard's final greetings to the champions. To Bolingbroke, as knowing him to be in the wrong, he uses the Delphic words,

> "Cousin of Hereford, as thy cause is right,
> So be thy fortune in this royal fight;"

and to Mowbray, the one in reality fighting his own battle,

> "Farewell, my lord; securely I espy
> Virtue with valour couched in thine eye."

Richard, however, with a sort of knavish cunning, has a way of his own out of his difficulty. At the very moment when the champions are moving to the encounter, he throws his warder down, and so brings to a close a combat which, however it had ended, would have left him in a position so difficult that he declined to face it.

Instead of facing it, he adopts an expedient which, though it furnishes an immediate solution, is pregnant with consequences ruinous to himself. He calls a council, and as the result of its deliberations announces that Bolingbroke is to be banished for ten years, and Norfolk for life. The grounds on which this is done are stated in terms which were not ill calculated to

secure the support of the peace-loving section of the nation; but they were not sufficient to gloss over the real injustice of the deed. And note further: not one single word of Gloucester's death is uttered by any one of the actors in the scene.

Richard is evidently much relieved by the patient manner in which each receives his sentence. It is a triumph of royal authority, and in an excess of confidence he proceeds to exact from them a futile and foolish oath—futile because he had no means to enforce its observance, and foolish because it was only calculated to suggest the danger which he wished to avoid.

> "You never shall . . .
> Embrace each other's love in banishment;
> Nor ever look upon each other's face;
> Nor ever write, regreet, nor reconcile
> This lowering tempest of your home-bred hate;
> Nor ever by advised purpose meet,
> To plot, contrive, or complot any ill,
> 'Gainst us, our state, our subjects, or our land."

Before they separate, Bolingbroke presses Mowbray to confess himself a traitor, but Mowbray not only declines to do so, but also gives a very clear hint to the king of the course which affairs will probably take.

> "No, Bolingbroke; if ever I were traitor,
> My name be blotted from the book of life,
> And I from heaven banished, as from hence!
> But what thou art, heaven, thou, and I do know;
> And all too soon, I fear, the king shall rue."

Relieved of the embarrassment of Norfolk's presence, Richard makes a feeble attempt to win favour from the House of Lancaster by remitting a portion of Bolingbroke's sentence, a remission which in no way effects its object, while by attempting to throw the blame of the decision of the council on poor old John of Gaunt he is guilty of an incredible meanness. Nothing shows Richard's weakness more than his attempts, repeated again and again, to bolster up his will by the use of the language of decision,—"The unstooping firmness of my upright soul"; "After our sentence, plaining comes too late"; "Six years we banish him, and he shall go"—language which no strong man would feel the need of, and for which no weak one would feel the stronger.

As the audience are now to take leave of Bolingbroke for a time, and their feelings towards him so far have hardly been the most favourable, Shakespeare contrives that his last conversation with Gaunt shall do something to raise their estimation of his nobility, and he quits the stage with an expression which leaves in their minds a pleasant recollection.

> "Where'er I wander, boast of this I can,—
> Though banished, yet a true-born Englishman."

We now pass to Act i. Scene 4, in which we are to obtain a further insight into Richard's character. A considerable period has elasped, and Bolingbroke is now in exile. We find Richard in close conclave with Aumerle, the son of the Duke of York, the same who

in the last scene begged Hereford to keep him informed of his place of exile. There is a perfect understanding between the two speakers. Hatred and fear of Bolingbroke are the links that bind them together. Aumerle knows that he has a ready ear into which to pour his satirical description of his parting with the man they hated, and Richard has no hesitation in making Aumerle the confidant of his disquietude with regard to Bolingbroke's intentions. Aumerle says—

> "Marry, would the word 'farewell' have lengthened hours
> And added years to his short banishment,
> He should have had a volume of farewells;
> But since it would not, he had none of me."

And Richard—

> "He is our cousin, cousin; but 'tis doubt,
> When time shall call him home from banishment,
> Whether our kinsman come to see his friends.
> Ourself, and Bushy, Bagot here, and Green,
> Observed his courtship to the common people;—
> How he did seem to dive into their hearts,
> With humble and familiar courtesy;
> . . . . . .
> As were our England in reversion his,
> And he our subjects' next degree in hope."

Such are the true feelings of the man who had parted from Bolingbroke with mock sorrow and the oily phrase of

> "Six frozen winters spent,
> Return with welcome home from banishment."

But we have not quite finished with Richard yet. We have only seen him in his relation to the royal family and to the nobility. To them he may be as unscrupulous as a Tudor, but yet be as good a sovereign as Elizabeth herself. Was it so? We shall see. There is further trouble brewing in Ireland, and the king will go in person to the wars. But the sinews of war are absent. Too great a court and too liberal largess had exhausted the royal revenue, and it was necessary to mortgage the supplies of the future for a supply of ready money. If that came short, a system of benevolence was to be called into service, for the business is pressing and brooks no delay. Suddenly a further source of supply is opened, and Shakespeare knew well that fatal facility with which the code of honour is sapped by impecuniosity. Old John of Gaunt is ill, and sends to request the presence of his nephew; and how does Richard receive the news?

> "Now put it, heaven, in his physician's mind
> To help him to his grave immediately!
> The lining of his coffers shall make coats
> To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.—
> Come, gentlemen, let's all go visit him:
> Pray heaven we may make haste, and come too late."

Shakespeare now (Act ii. Scene 1) transports us to the bedside of Gaunt. Here we find the Duke of York, who now with Lancaster alone survives of the last generation, and we are put in possession of the reason why the sick man has sent for his nephew. His object is to reprove

him, possibly because he feels that hitherto he has too much held his peace, and has not given that active opposition to the ill courses of the king which his position demanded of him. York's view is that all counsel to the king is wasted, and he brushes aside Gaunt's suggestion that the words of dying men have an unusual influence. Richard's ears are filled with flatteries; evil companions and addiction to Italian habits have corrupted his manners. It is little use to appeal to the wit when the will draws the other way. In spite, however, of this discouragement, Gaunt persists in his intention, and in a speech, quoted again and again for the pure spirit of patriotism which it breathes, he sets forth the special iniquity of neglect of kingly duty in an English sovereign. But we should note that Gaunt's loyalty, though true, is not personal. It is England, not England's king, that appeals to his affection.

> "This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise;
> This fortress, built by Nature for herself,
> . . . . . .
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> . . . . . .
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

Such is his apostrophe, and it is this land of all others that the king, shame on him,

> "Has now leased out (I die pronouncing it)
> Like to a tenement, or pelting farm."

Such is the frame of mind in which Gaunt is at the moment when Richard enters. With him comes the queen, whose presence brings to remembrance the unpopular truce with France which accompanied her marriage. France was ever cruel in the queens she sent to England. From Isabella the She-wolf down to Henrietta Maria their names spelt ruin to the land of their adoption, and the unfortunate child before us (she was in reality only ten), though in no sense guilty, supplied not the least important element in the causes of Richard's fall. Beside the queen walks Aumerle, the double-faced son of York, who had just been fanning Richard's enmity against the banished Hereford. Behind him stand Bushy, Green, and Bagot, typical of the low-born favourites whose rise to power had ever coincided with evil times; and scowling in the far background are Ross and Willoughby, representing the ancient nobility of the realm, the hereditary enemies of the king's favourites. It was a striking and suggestive congregation.

Arrived at the sick bed, the queen's address, "How fares our noble uncle, Lancaster?" is wanting in nothing of respect and solicitude; but Richard, conscious of his late utterance, "Pray heaven we may make haste, and come too late," can hardly conceal his impatience at finding the dying man yet alive. His address is altogether rude and offensive. Confronted with Richard, Gaunt exhibits a very curious but, to my mind, very natural combination of flippancy and bitter-

ness. The hopelessness of remonstrance with a king who comes to see a dying man surrounded with everything that could remind the sufferer of his evil doings is present in every word. At first, in punning play upon his name, he upbraids the king for starving him of his children's looks, and then rising to something of a prophetic strain, and full of recollection of his late description of his native land, he plainly asks the king how he can dare to treat his England so.

> "Why, cousin, wert thou regent of the world,
> It were a shame to let this land by lease:
> But, for thy world, enjoying but this land,
> Is it not more than shame to shame it so?
> Landlord of England art thou now, not king;
> Thy state of law is bond-slave to the law,
> And——"

Such plain speaking is altogether new to the flattery-filled ear of Richard, and in his anger he loses all control over himself, and flies into an ungovernable passion. So far Gaunt had confined himself to Richard's general political conduct, and had said nothing of the personal guilt of Richard in the murder of Gloucester, but now he goes on to speak of this, and passing over altogether the share of Mowbray, he plainly denounces the king, and the king only, as the author of the bloody crime.

> "Oh, spare me not, my brother Edward's son,
> For that I was his father Edward's son;
> That blood already, like the pelican,

Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused ;
My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning soul,
. . . . . .
May be a precedent and witness good,
That *thou* respect'st not spilling Edward's blood."

Such is the last address of Lancaster to his wayward nephew, and even the weak York's feeble attempt to soften down the asperity of the dying man's words does nothing to abate their real significance. If Richard has any feeling of patriotism, any regard for the honour of his country, if he even has any true grasp of the seriousness of his situation, he will retrace his steps. But no ; neither shame, nor remorse, nor policy suffices to turn him. "*Quem deus vult perdere, prius dementat*," and he goes on his course unmoved. There is a sort of fatalism in his words which gives the impression that he can hardly be quite sane.

"Right ; you say true : as Hereford's love, so his ;
As theirs, so mine ; and all be as it is."

When Gaunt's death is announced, a similar sentiment escapes him.

"The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he ;
His time is spent, our pilgrimage must be :
So much for that."

But not the faintest attention does he pay to Gaunt's advice. On the contrary, Gaunt's death is the signal for the immediate confiscation of his property.

Even York, who represents the slowly-moved conscience of the easy-going man of loyalty, slow to open

the mind to new impressions, and so fit emblem of the people over whom Richard had to rule, is moved by this; and had Richard possessed a spark of insight into character, he might have read in York's speech a sentence of deposition against himself. What right had he himself to the crown, which did not equally entitle Hereford to the property of his father? By what law was he king if not by the law of inheritance? And was not his action in seizing another's goods the open proclamation of the fact that the reign of law was over and that the good old times had returned,

> "When he shall take who has the power,
> And he shall keep who can"?

In such an era possessors of Richard's character are like to fare ill. But the warning of York, like that of Lancaster, falls all unheeded.

> "Think what you will, we seize into our hands
> His plate, his goods, his money and his lands."

And what is still more remarkable, Richard, who hears York say,

> "I'll not be by the while: my liege, farewell:
> What will ensue hereof, there's none can tell;
> But by bad courses may be understood,
> That their events can never fall out good,"

appoints him next moment regent of the kingdom during his own absence in Ireland; and so saying, gaily leaves the stage with the queen and his favourites.

The time is now come to see what are the sentiments

of the high nobility of England, who have so far stood by in silence. We have three of them before us—Northumberland, the representative of the ancient name of Percy, Willoughby, and Ross. Their conversation is extremely significant. Percy takes the lead, the others meet him with cautious but approving looks. Their sentiments are admirably selected to show the attitude of mind which the English always attempted to preserve as long as possible to an erring king.

> "The king is not himself, but basely led
> By flatterers."

That is precisely the sentiment which sent Gaveston to his doom on Blacklow Hill, and placed the executions of Strafford and Laud before that of Charles I. Personal danger is the spur to immediate action.

> "What they will inform,
> Merely in hate, 'gainst any of us all,
> That will the king severely prosecute
> 'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs."

The probability of successful action is based upon the infatuation with which Richard has alienated all classes of his subjects.

> "The commons hath he pilled with grievous taxes,
> And quite lost their hearts: the nobles hath he fined
> For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts."

Nor can these exactions be justified by necessity. The king's income has not been spent on heroic enterprises.

> "Wars have not wasted it, for warred he hath not,
> But basely yielded upon compromise
> That which his ancestors achieved with blows:
> More hath he spent in peace than they in wars."

Such is the picture of England that is drawn by the earls: but Northumberland, a man of action, is ready with the remedy. Let them strike a blow for themselves. Already the Duke of Hereford and with him many trusty friends are on the move, and

> "With eight tall ships, three thousand men of war,
> Are making hither with all due expedience,
> And shortly mean to touch our northern shore:
> Perhaps they had ere this; but that they stay
> The first departing of the king for Ireland."

With one accord the cry is: "Ho, for Ravenspurg!" Such is the first step towards Richard's fall.

So far the impressions we have received of Richard's character have been wholly bad. We have seen him at once weak, frivolous, spendthrift, unscrupulous, cunning, and impolitic. Had he no good side? Shakespeare answers that he has, and in Act ii. Scene 2 he begins the process of building up in his audience a new feeling of pity for the erring king. The first step towards this is to excite our pity for the innocent queen. In her mouth he is "sweet Richard," a man capable of inspiring a tender passion; and it is by the forebodings of this lady that the chord of pity is first touched.

Nor are her anticipations of evil without full justification. The news of Hereford's landing has spread

dismay among the minions of the absent king. All is confusion. Every hour brings tidings of some new defection. Northumberland, Ross, Willoughby, and Beaumond are hurrying to the north. Worcester has broken his staff, and he and all the household servants are going the same road. The regent York is beside himself with anxiety and terror. Bushy, Bagot, and Green have no thought but of safety. Following they have none, and their guilty consciences tell them plainly that short shrift will be theirs if they fall into the clutches of the angry nobility. Of Richard there is nothing known. Heaven will not help those who cannot help themselves.

> "The wind sits fair for news to go to Ireland,
> But none returns."

Meanwhile Bolingbroke is steadily rising in popular favour. Without a check he has made his way from Ravenspurg to Berkeley in Gloucestershire (Act ii. Scene 3). To every one he meets the cunning dissembler gives the same graceful reception and tells the same plausible tale. He has come to require at the king's hands his forfeited estates. He demands the rights which the law gives him. Such a show of legality appeals to York, the typical Englishman, on his weak side. He will commit himself to neither party; he will remain a neutral; nor does he refuse to be Hereford's companion on the march to Bristol, whither he goes to weed and purge away the traitors of the commonwealth, "Bushy and Bagot and their complices."

Such is Hereford's triumphal march; such the crumbling into nothing of Richard's ill-assorted government. Nor does Salisbury, the one energetic supporter of Richard, fare much better. He has got together (Act ii. Scene 4) an army of Welshmen, but they have no leader. Richard failed to cross with the fair wind which brought Salisbury over, and the adverse gale again resumed its sway and forbade the passage. Rumours of his death, the evil omens which play so large a part in the minds of the imaginative Celts, defeat all Salisbury's efforts. Before Richard can put himself at its head the army of Welshmen has melted away.

One more deed has to be done. Bushy and Green must pay the penalty of their crimes (Act iii. Scene 1), and with rare ingenuity Shakespeare makes the scene an opportunity to show the true kingliness of Bolingbroke's character. Nothing can exceed the dignity of his address to the fallen minions, at whose door, according to traditional English practice, he places the whole guiltiness of Richard.

"Bring forth these men.—
Bushy and Green, I will not vex your souls
(Since presently your souls must part your bodies)
With too much urging your pernicious lives,
For 'twere no charity: yet, to wash your blood
From off my hands, here in the view of men
I will unfold some causes of your deaths.
You have misled a prince, a royal king,
A happy gentleman in blood and lineaments,
By you unhappied and disfigured clean ·

You have in manner, with your sinful hours,
Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him;
Broke the possession of a royal bed,
And stained the beauty of a fair queen's cheeks
With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs.
. . . . . .
See them delivered over
To execution and the hand of death."

This scene concludes the first part of the play. We have seen King Richard in prosperity, linking together the chain of events which has placed his cousin Hereford in the position of ruler of England; we have yet to trace the development of events when the king *de jure* and the king *de facto* are brought face to face.

Part II

Addison, in criticising the poem of *Paradise Lost*, points out the ingenuity with which Milton, by exhibiting to his readers two Adams, one sinless and one fallen, has in reality doubled the character. In this play Shakespeare uses a similar device. We have already had an opportunity of estimating the character borne by Richard in his days of prosperity. How will it be affected by the advent of adversity? After long delay, and on the very day after the dispersal of Salisbury's forces, he has landed (Act iii. Scene 2) on the shores of Wales. In his first speech we have an example of the fantastic mode of thought and expression which

euphuism had brought into fashion. Richard fancies that his England's soil is wounded by the tread of rebel hoofs. He implores the spiders and heavy-gaited toads to plant themselves in their way. May adders lurk beneath every flower they stoop to gather. Let Nature put forth her weapons against his adversaries, for

> "This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones
> Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king
> Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms."

In this speech Shakespeare seems wishful to draw our attention to the unpractical, almost feminine character of Richard. He has an intense love of his country, but it shows itself not in deed but in word. He has an immense capacity for thought, but his resolves die away before they can be translated into action. So long as all went well with him, so long as he was able to rest his title to respect and loyalty upon an undisputed possession of his throne, such sentiments might not have been inappropriate, but they are wholly out of place now. The world has been reduced to its pristine elements. Every man is to have the position for which he is fit, and here is Richard speaking as though kingship without kingliness were still a possibility.

The rebuke of this attitude of mind is placed in the mouth of the Bishop of Carlisle, who shows concealed beneath a bishop's robes the spirit which might well beseem a king.

"Fear not, my lord; that Power that made you king
Hath power to keep you king, in spite of all.
The means that heaven yields must be embraced,
And not neglected; else, if heaven would,
And we will not, heaven's offer we refuse,
The proffered means of succour and redress."

But the rebuke is quite thrown away. Richard still believes that in some mysterious manner heaven will interpose in his behalf.

"Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord:
For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed,
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall; for heaven still guards the right."

In spite, however, of all this talk of angels and divine interposition, the next sentence shows us that in reality Richard's trust is in the hand of man; and on hearing from Salisbury that his force of Welshmen is dispersed, he falls into a very human anxiety. Still he flatters himself that there is the army of York on which to fall back, and that Bushy, Bagot, Green, will be exerting their utmost energy. But on learning from Scroop of the death of his favourites, Richard allows himself to sink to the very depths of despair. It is he himself who first suggests the notion of his deposition and death. In a moment his fantastic vision of a kingly dignity

unassailable and inviolable fades from his view, and he sees himself like others—a man.

> "Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
> With solemn reverence ; throw away respect,
> Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,
> For you have but mistook me all the while ;
> I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief,
> Need friends."

From this fit of depression Carlisle and Aumerle set themselves to rouse him to exertion ; and for a moment it seems as if Richard the man was to show himself worthy of Richard the king.

> "Thou chid'st me well :—proud Bolingbroke, I come
> To change blows with thee for our day of doom.
> This ague-fit of fear is over-blown ;
> An easy task it is to win our own."

Nay, indeed, says Scroop,

> "Your uncle York is joined with Bolingbroke ;
> And all your northern castles yielded up,
> And all your southern gentlemen in arms
> Upon his party."

This last blow completes the tale of disaster, and Richard, recognising the hopelessness of further effort, prepares to hide himself away, and thus addresses Aumerle—

> "Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth
> Of that sweet way I was in to despair!
> What say you now? What comfort have we now?
> By heaven, I'll hate him everlastingly

That bids me be of comfort any more.
Go to Flint Castle: there I'll pine away:
A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey."

In the next scene (Act iii. Scene 3) we find that even this poor hope of escape has failed him, for Bolingbroke has found his place of refuge. How will the fallen king be treated? The attitudes which Bolingbroke, York, and Northumberland adopt towards him are each different. Northumberland has already so far forgotten his duty as to leave Richard's title of royalty unpronounced. York is all pity and regret. Bolingbroke, though studiously observant of all outward respect and courtesy, cannot help showing the masterfulness of one who feels that the future development of the situation is in his hands. As yet, however, he carefully avoids a larger claim than to the restoration of his hereditary lands. In the scene that follows, the whole initiative of his fall is taken by Richard himself. Whether he speaks in private to Aumerle or in public to Bolingbroke and York, his every word suggests that from his grasp the sceptre is passing away, and that, to adopt his own words, Bolingbroke's sole part is that of one who "offers no opposition to the will of heaven." It is Richard who first uses the phrase "King Bolingbroke." It is his mouth which utters the true criticism on the situation,

"Well you deserve:—they well deserve to have,
That know the strong'st and surest way to get,"

and it is he who first proposes the journey to London

which was the natural prelude to an abdication of the crown.

In Act iii. Scene 4 we are shown in the misery of the queen what is the fate which Richard's ill conduct has brought upon his friends. The garden with its enclosing fence is the type of England. Its order and peace are designed to show how easily such a compact and isolated dominion might be ruled by a competent hand. The operations of the garden exhibit, as in a glass, the true maxims of government, which even the commonalty can appreciate. We learn from the mouth of the gardener that Richard's fate is recognised to be the natural outcome of his inefficiency.

"What pity is it
That he had not so trimmed and dressed his land,
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees;
Lest, being over-proud with sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself:
Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have lived to bear, and he to taste
Their fruits of duty: Superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live:
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down

Serv. What, think you then the king shall be deposed?

Gard. Depressed he is already; and deposed,
'Tis doubt, he will be:

. . . . . .

King Richard, he is in the mighty hold
Of Bolingbroke; their fortunes both are weighed:

In your lord's scale is nothing but himself,

. . . . . .

But in the balance of great Bolingbroke,
Besides himself, are all the English peers,
And with that odds he weighs King Richard down."

The next scene (Act iv. Scene 1) gives additional evidence of the perfidy of Richard's courtiers, for it appears from the mouth of Bagot that Aumerle is the real murderer of Gloucester. A violent outburst of recrimination and denial follows this declaration, which is chiefly useful as showing the impassive but strong character of Bolingbroke, who contrives with no special appeal to his authority to keep the disputants under his control.

So far Bolingbroke has studiously avoided any action which could be construed into making a bid for the crown; but now the suggestion comes to him from Richard himself, who, by York's mouth, announces that he

"With willing soul
Adopts thee heir, and his high sceptre yields
To the possession of thy royal hand:
Ascend his throne, descending now from him—
And long live Henry, of that name the fourth!"

The move once made, Bolingbroke loses no time in closing with the suggestion.

"In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne."

Here, however, it is time for Shakespeare to pro-

nounce his opinion on the rebellion of subjects and the deposition of kings. On this point Shakespeare took up no uncertain ground. Richard may have been unfit to reign. He may have handed over his duties to others still more unfit to discharge them than himself; but that in no way excused those who took a part in his deposition. After all, to his mind, the right attitude was that of Gaunt—

> "Heaven's is the quarrel; for heaven's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in his sight,
> Hath caused his death; the which if wrongfully,
> Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
> An angry arm against his minister"

—and he places in the mouth of the honest and efficient Bishop of Carlisle the duty of announcing his views.

> "Marry, God forbid!
> . . . . . .
> What subject can give sentence on his king?
> And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?
> Thieves are not judged but they are by to hear,
> Although apparent guilt be seen in them;
> And shall the figure of God's majesty,
> His captain, steward, deputy-elect,
> Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
> Be judged by subject and inferior breath,
> And he himself not present?
> . . . . . .
> My lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
> Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king:
> And if you crown him, let me prophesy—

The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act.

. . . . . .

O, if you rear this house against this house,
It will the woefullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth:
Prevent, resist it, let it not be so,
Lest children's children cry against you—woe!"

The remainder of Act iv. is occupied with a representation of the deposition, and it is not one upon which we can with much satisfaction dilate. No material advance is made in our knowledge of the character either of Richard or of Bolingbroke. The one is as fantastic, emotional, and ineffective as the other is practical, cold, and immovable. There is more in Richard's speech to call out our contempt than to provoke our pity. His utter want of control over his emotions strikes us as un-English and effeminate. That a man who was cast in such a mould could for so long impose himself upon the nation is in itself a puzzle. We feel it a relief when Richard's departure for the Tower brings the scene to a close.

On its way the gloomy pageant finds itself beneath the windows, or passing the spot in the street, where his queen has taken her post. The scene is a remarkable one, for Shakespeare seems to have introduced it here mainly to show how Richard, deprived of his crown, has become, even to the eyes of those most intimate with him, a changed man. In the broken-spirited

prisoner before her his queen can barely recognise the kingly form of her sweet Richard.

> "What, is my Richard both in shape and mind
> Transformed and weakened? Hath Bolingbroke
> Deposed thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?
> The lion, dying, thrusteth forth his paw,
> And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage
> To be o'erpowered; and wilt thou, pupil-like,
> Take thy correction mildly, kiss the rod,
> And fawn on rage with base humility,
> Which art a lion, and a king of beasts?"

It is too true. Even this appeal fails wholly to move the sentimental king. In action how impotent; in word how strong! How masterful in his firm grasp of the wickedness of rebellion, yet how powerless to strike a blow for a rightful cause! With what vigour of expression does he turn upon Northumberland when that mouthpiece of brutality announces his incarceration at Pomfret! With what accuracy does he paint the invariable tendency of rebellion to reproduce her brood!

Of the somewhat grotesque scene (Act v. Scene 2) in which Aumerle's new treachery is discovered by his father while his life is granted at the prayer of his mother it is needless to say very much. It advances the plot by explaining the pretext on which the usurping king decides on the death of his rival: but its real importance lies in the light it throws on the character of York. York is weak but loyal; true to Richard so long as Richard is true to himself. Between Richard and

Bolingbroke he is neutral, but he can be thoroughly loyal to a real king. In this he is a type of the populace, not prone to revolt, but quick to recognise a master-hand. Though unable to initiate, it readily accepts the logic of facts. We may pass rapidly towards the completion of the story. A prisoner in Pomfret Castle, Richard exhibits precisely the same tendency to sentimental reflection that we have already noted as the dominant trait in his character. Yet Shakespeare even here finds means to remind his audience that Richard was beloved. A poor groom of his stable travelling towards York, and mindful of his old master, contrives to visit him (Act v. Scene 5), and the honest fellow's genuine emotion at the thought of Richard's favourite horse being employed to bear Bolingbroke in his triumphal entry, tells us again the same story of Richard's personal amiability of character which has been so often emphasized by the mouth of the queen. Then comes the final scene. Confronted with his murderers, Richard, whose tone of mind has for some time irresistibly reminded us of Hamlet, especially in the speech which begins,

> "I have been studying how I may compare
> This prison where I live unto the world,"

shows the same fierce energy of despair as does the Dane. One after another his would-be assassins fall beneath his blows, but his energy has come too late, and with a phrase that recalls to us the last moments of Louis XVI, the unfortunate king miserably dies.

Such is Shakespeare's rendering of the destiny of Richard II, and we must admit that, considering the materials at his disposal, he has contrived to construct a tragedy of remarkable power. It is true that the play can hardly be classed in the very front rank of his works. It stands on a distinctly lower level than the great tragedies with which we have hitherto dealt. On the whole, we must be of opinion that Shakespeare found the plot somewhat deficient in interest for his purpose. There is here no sense of an over-abundance of material as is felt in *Hamlet* or in *King Lear*. On the contrary, there is in many of the scenes somewhat of prolixity and of over-refinement of sentiment; and this is especially the case in the deposition scenes, where Richard, with exasperating verbosity, tells us little or nothing which adds to our knowledge of his character.

If we examine the play as a whole, we shall find that both in the arrangement of characters and in the incidents of the plot there is a symmetry of a very remarkable kind. At the head of one group stands Richard, of the other Bolingbroke. Each has his immediate group of followers. Hereford's are Northumberland, Percy, Ross, Willoughby, and Fitzwater; Richard's Aumerle, Bushy, Bagot, Green. But what a contrast there is between the two! All Bolingbroke's followers are powerful in themselves, eager to anticipate his action and to move forward whether he will or no. Richard's followers are his minions, the favourites of his lighter hours; but having no strength in themselves,

they not only fall away but drag their master with them. Between the two groups stand York and Carlisle. York is easy-going, loyal, but with a loyalty which instinctively leads him to attach himself rather to the king *de facto* than to him who reigns *de jure;* while Carlisle, with a stronger hold on principle, is equally ready to denounce with firmness the follies of a king, and to brave the wrath of a usurper. It is worthy of note that Carlisle only comes to the front when misfortunes begin to close around his prince. The court of Bagot, Bushy, and Green had been no place for him. He is the type of the counsellor whom Richard might have attached to himself had he possessed the faculty of discerning true worth, as Salisbury and York were specimens of those who were ready to serve him had they been allowed to do so. What a different character would York have been had the hereditary king been a man of real power! As it is, he first falls into ineffectiveness through want of a leader, and then, attracted by the stronger side, becomes a thorough-going supporter of a usurper. Of the ladies, the queen recalls to us the lovable character of Richard as a man; the Duchess of Gloucester, equally devoted to her husband, shows how crimes of violence involve the innocent.

In the conduct of the plot the same balance is maintained. We have Richard in prosperity and in adversity, and Bolingbroke in the like. We see Bolingbroke under the doom of banishment and Richard under sentence of

deposition. We see how one while king is unable to command obedience, even when it is demanded as a right; while the other, even before his elevation to the throne, can command an unquestioning submission. The one as a king cannot order the commonwealth; the other, even without a vestige of legality, secures adherents by his show of practical ability to reform the weakened state and to mete out justice to those who had wasted her. Similarly we find Richard, when confronted with a quarrel between his nobles, first weakly procrastinating and then outraging propriety by a flagrant violation of the principles of justice. We see Bolingbroke, on the other hand, not only refusing to take advantage of a similar quarrel to get rid of a double-dyed traitor like Aumerle, but even protecting him at the risk of offending powerful adherents. Even when an act of overt treachery puts Aumerle into his power, Bolingbroke refuses to imitate the example of Richard; and in spite of York's appeals to the dictates of policy, declines to smear his hands in his kinsman's blood.

In estimating *Richard II* it is impossible to keep out of sight the fact that this play is but the introduction to a series of historical dramas. In Richard we have the king who, though a king by right, loses an inherited crown by his want of kingly character. In Henry IV we have a sovereign who, though a usurper, keeps his crown because he deserves to be a king. In Richard we have a wasteful prince who allows the companions

of his lighter hours to become the guides of his political conduct and the keepers of his conscience. In Henry V we have a prince as pleasure-loving as Richard, but, unlike Richard, able to shake himself loose at will from his companions, and in the long-run showing that even the family of a usurper could produce a model of English kingship. Again, in Henry VI we have a reproduction of the weaknesses of Richard if not of his vices.

"Delicta majorum immeritus lues."

But the Nemesis is strong upon him; and, strange to say, it is the death of another Gloucester which forms the turning-point in his reign.

Such is Shakespeare's reading of history. Richard had committed two crimes. He had slain a kinsman; he had betrayed his country. For this he is condemned to be deposed as a punishment for his political offence, and to be put to death at the suggestion of a kinsman as the proper retribution for his crime against his family. But for both of these full punishment must follow. Henry, who had been a usurper, is as king tormented by frequent rebellions, and by anticipations that his own son will turn out to be as worthless a character as Richard. This is brought out in Act v. Scene 3, where Bolingbroke asks, almost piteously, of the whereabouts of his "unthrifty son." Henry's great fear is that the prince will turn out another Richard II, and he tells him

so plainly in *Henry IV*, Part I., Act iii. Scene 2. But Shakespeare was careful to differentiate the two. Richard II could never have made the speech pronounced by Henry at the close of Scene 2, Act i., *Henry IV*, Part I., in which he gives the audience to understand that while he may divert himself with Falstaff, he has character enough to be himself when he chooses. After this speech the audience could enjoy the Falstaff scenes, which would have been quite impossible had they believed themselves to be looking on at the creation of another ruined character like Richard II. Henry IV even fears that the prince in his turn is plotting against the crown itself. And full punishment comes for both crimes when Henry VI is not only deposed by a descendant of Roger Mortimer, but also falls a murdered sovereign in the Tower. But the nation, which had looked on passive while her rightful king was deposed, must also suffer, and her lot is to bear the curse of civil war. So crime breeds crime, and curse is visited by curse, till at last, when retribution is exhausted, another Henry, too little related to the House of Lancaster to be responsible for its misdeeds, inheriting only the patriotism of John of Gaunt, arises, and after himself dealing out the last sentence of justice upon the murderous Richard III, seats himself upon the throne to become the progenitor of the noble family under whose rule England, according to Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, was in his time flourishing and at peace.

OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

Part I

In dealing with the fortunes of the Moor of Venice Shakespeare took in hand a problem which essentially differed from that he solved in *Richard II.* There his materials were part and parcel of the history of his country. The *denoûment* had been settled for him. His representation of the characters had to be made conformable to the event and to tradition. In *Othello* the materials were his own; he had no preconceived opinions to gratify. Alike in the characters and in the plot he was at liberty to follow his own inclination, and to make the requirements of his art his only guide. We may therefore promise ourselves a double pleasure, to be derived not only from the study of character but also from the management of a wholly imaginary plot.

The scene opens in a street of Venice. Two characters are before us, both men, and it is the first business of the dramatist so to contrive that their words may make

upon the audience a true and immediate impression as to their character. Within the space of a dozen lines this has been effectually done.

"*Roderigo.* Tush! never tell me; I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, should'st know of this."

From this opening it is clear that the relation existing between the two is that of victim and victimiser. Iago has been engaged in some enterprise for which Roderigo has supplied the wherewithal, and his employer has reason to complain of some suppression of intelligence on the part of the employed.

"*Iago.* 'Sblood, but you will not hear me:
If ever I did dream of such a matter,
Abhor me."

This sentence reveals still more the relationship. Iago is so sure of his ground that he can address Roderigo in the language of contempt.

The next sentence, "Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate," shows that the link between the two is hatred of a third party who has clearly gained some advantage over the pair, and Iago's set speech places the audience in possession of the facts.

Iago, it seems, is a military officer. The "he" to whom reference is made is his commanding officer, by whom Iago has been disappointed in his suit for the post of lieutenant. For two reasons this rebuff is

especially exasperating. First, he had procured the recommendation of three persons of distinction, who unluckily had made their application too late; and second, Cassio, to whom this appointment had been given, appeared in the opinion of his rival to have but slender qualifications for the coveted post. It does not appear why the selection had been made, but it is an additional source of grievance to the speaker that Cassio is a Florentine, whereas he himself as a Venetian had a prior claim to promotion in the service of his own state.

This slight has deeply rankled in the breast of the speaker, who unblushingly confesses that he has accepted the lower grade of ensign, or ancient, solely with a view to the prosecution of his revenge. Iago is a man who prides himself upon his power of dissimulation.

> "For when my outward action doth demonstrate
> The native act and figure of my heart
> In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
> But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
> For daws to peck at: I am not what I am."

But what is the cause of Roderigo's aversion? It must be great, for sooner than be his enemy's lieutenant "he would have been his hangman." We are not kept long in unnecessary doubt. The commander has effected a successful elopement, and as he has kept Iago out of a lieutenancy he has out-generaled Roderigo in pursuit of a wife. So affairs stand, and the injured parties are

even now on their way to the house of the lady's father with the double design of breaking the intelligence and of raising the hue and cry against the runaways.

With noisy shoutings they arouse the sleepy parent. A few words put him in possession of the facts, and do so in such a way as to exaggerate every circumstance which was likely to rouse his anger. For this is no common elopement. The prettiest girl in Venice, the heiress of one of its most distinguished senators, has

> "made a gross revolt;
> Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes
> In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
> Of here and everywhere."

Her lover, in fact, is exactly the stamp of person whom any respectable and substantial citizen would reject as the suitor of his daughter, a mere soldier of fortune, here to-day and gone to-morrow, a man whose antecedents held out no hopes of a regular and well-ordered establishment, of dubious nationality, nay, worse than that—a Moor.

So far Iago and Roderigo have made common cause, but now Iago gives the audience the first specimen of his duplicity. For no sooner does the old senator Brabantio bestir himself than Iago, under colour of the excuse that it will never do for him, an ancient, to be called in evidence against his commanding officer, contrives to withdraw himself from the scene. To appear in such a character would be to jeopardise his

prospects, for it is preposterous to expect that the Venetian senate will be foolish enough to sacrifice their only general because he has effected a successful elopement, and it behoves a man of prudence like Iago to keep himself out of such an awkward scrape. But while making his retreat he explains that Roderigo must not think that he has abandoned his hatred of the Moor. Even if Iago makes some politic show of friendship towards Othello, it will be all a sham.

Meanwhile Brabantio, who can attribute his daughter's infatuation to nothing more natural than magic, hurries off in pursuit, and following the clue left by Iago makes his way towards the Sagittary. Iago has made the best use of his time. Already (Act i. Scene 2) he has roused Othello, and pretending to be his friend, has warned him that Brabantio is on his track. So zealous is he, that, according to his own account, only a natural repugnance to murder has held him back from stabbing the old senator, whose abuse of his officer was more than he could bear. Othello, however, takes the matter very coolly. Like Iago, he believes that his services to the state are too valuable to be lightly thrown away. If it is merely a question of rank, he can make boast of his royal lineage and contend that in point of comparison the match is as equal on his side as on that of his bride. Fortune plays into the Moor's hands; for the moment of his trial is coincident with a crisis in the fortunes of the state. News of an immediate attack upon Cyprus has

been brought, and even now the senators in council require the presence of their general. At the door of the Sagittary, Cassio, who brings the requisition, meets Brabantio and his following. Swords are drawn, and Brabantio, pouring out upon Othello the overflowing phials of his wrath, announces his intention of taking him to prison.

Shakespeare next (Act i. Scene 3) directs our attention to the council-chamber of the Venetian senators, the gravity of whose deliberations is proportionate to the reputation for political sagacity which was enjoyed by that state. The certainty of the rumoured attack upon Cyprus has just been confirmed, when Brabantio hurries into the room, bringing along with him Othello and his companions; and the old senator, oblivious of state affairs when contrasted with his domestic calamities, insists upon an immediate hearing of his grievances. The accusation which he brings against the general of having, "by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks," abused and corrupted his daughter, is received with the gravity which was its due. One side, however, only has been heard, and the duke, speaking with the authority of the court, calls upon Othello to say what he can in his own defence.

Othello's speech, a "round unvarnished tale," puts upon the matter a complexion wholly different from that which it had borne in the angry imagination of Brabantio. He first calls for the production of the lady herself, and then

"presents
How he did thrive in that fair lady's love."

It seems that he had been her father's friend, oft invited to his house, and oftentimes called upon to tell the good old man the story of his life.

"Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels' history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven,
. . . . . .
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline:
But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
Which ever as she could with haste despatch
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse: which I observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intentively: I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears,
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffered. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful:

She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
That heaven had made her such a man: she thanked me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used:
Here comes the lady; let her witness it."

The effect of this narrative is shown by the duke's remark, "I think this tale would win my daughter too," and it receives the fullest confirmation from Desdemona herself, who, in phrases that bring to mind those of Cordelia, declares that her duty as well as her inclination binds her irrevocably to her Moorish husband. With fairly good grace poor Brabantio gives his hand to the Moor. His hardly subdued grief for the cloud which his daughter's hasty action had thrown over his now desolate home is designed by Shakespeare to make us realise the preliminary mistake which has been made by the newly wedded couple. The shadow of a past error hangs over the bridal, while the break-up of the bridal party, and the hurried departure of the bridegroom for the wars, serve to accentuate the natural repugnance of Brabantio to see his daughter's lot linked to a man so much the sport of duty. What will Desdemona do? Her father refuses to receive her, and even had he been willing, both she and Othello assert their repugnance to take advantage of his hospitality. No! She has chosen to be a soldier's wife, and she will

share a soldier's fortunes. So to Cyprus she will go; but not with him. Even on the wedding-day man and wife are to be separated. The urgency of war admits of no delay; and Othello will make an instant start, while Desdemona will follow under the escort of his ancient, Iago.

We are now in a position to form some estimate of the characters of the leading personages in the play. In Othello, Shakespeare means us to recognise the man of action, whose life has been spent in deeds of military prowess and adventure, but who has had little experience either of the ways of society or of the intrigues of weaker men. Moreover, he is a man apart. A renegade from his own faith and an outcast from his own people, he is, indeed, the valued servant of the Venetian state, but is not regarded as on an equality with its citizens, and that though, as being of kingly descent, he regards himself as being at least the equal of its republican citizens. A homeless man, who had never experienced the soothing influences of domesticity. In short, a man strong in action but weak in intellectuality, of natural nobility of character, knowing no guile in himself and incapable of seeing it in others; but withal sensitive on the subject of his birth, and inclined to regard himself as an inheritor of the curse of outcast Ishmael.

To such a man the society of a girl like Desdemona would come almost as a revelation. She, so it seems, is in large measure the correlative of Miranda in

the *Tempest*. Both have been brought up in solitude with only paternal influence, and each with a natural *naïveté* makes the first advances to the man who wins her affections. Had Desdemona been a Portia she would never have attracted the Moor, who would have felt overawed by her intellectual superiority. Of a Beatrice he could never have been the Benedick. But in Desdemona he recognised his complement. To such a nature as his, her restfulness was in itself a soothing charm. Her housewifely virtues attracted the *habitué* of the camp. There was nothing in her wit to alarm him, while her womanly pity went to his heart. To such a true man as Othello, the nature most attractive was that of the true woman, and in Desdemona he found it in perfection. Moreover, there was something that must have been specially attractive in Desdemona's sacrifice of herself. As a necessary servant of the state, Othello was doubtless accustomed to flattery, but to love for his own sake he had hitherto been a stranger, and to find that he had almost unwittingly inspired such a passion in the mind of a beautiful Venetian girl must have been specially soothing to his vanity. Nor would this feeling be lessened by the fact that he was already somewhat advanced in age, a veteran to whom the sight of himself preferred before younger men must have been doubly delicious.

Natural, however, as Shakespeare has made the attachment of Othello and Desdemona, he seems to have deliberately laid stress upon the untoward circumstances

of their marriage. There is present even in the marriage peal a note of discord which may or may not augur ill for the future.

> "Adieu, brave Moor ; use Desdemona well."

Such is the parting injunction of the senator who had shown himself most far-sighted in the business of the state.

> "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see :
> She has deceived her father, and may thee,"

is the solemn warning given to his new son-in-law by the desolate Brabantio. "My life upon her faith" is the easy answer of Othello ; but warnings such as these, though easily tossed aside at the time, have a knack of sinking deep into the heart, and in fulness of time bearing their bitter fruit.

If danger is in the air, we instinctively feel that it will come from Iago. Already we have seen enough of him to be aware that he hates Othello and that he is utterly unscrupulous as to his means. We can well believe that, if it comes to a trial of skill between him and Othello, the brave and honest soldier may fall a victim to the wiles of so clever an impostor.

But of this Othello knows nothing. He does not even seem to have been aware that Iago cherished malevolent feelings against him on the score of Cassio's appointment. Had he ever done so he must have regarded Iago's action in bringing warning of Brabantio's

pursuit as sufficient proof of his uprightness and love. Had his confidence not been complete he would never have entrusted Desdemona to the escort of Iago and his wife Emilia.

But lest the audience should have any doubt as to Iago's intentions, Shakespeare has taken care that they shall hear his full iniquity from the mouth of Iago himself. That villain, as he unburdens his mind to Roderigo, has no belief either in the honesty of man or in the honour of woman. Nobility of character is to him a myth, and he is ready on mere suspicion to ascribe faults to others, and then to act as though his imaginations were proven facts. His one claim to virtue is a certain crooked conscience which makes him, while not hesitating a moment on the threshold of crime, search around for something which may palliate to himself the wanton malignity of his action. Thus he bolsters up the meanness of his actions by forcing himself into a certainty that Othello has been guilty of an intrigue with his wife Emilia, of the truth of which Shakespeare provides not a tittle of evidence. An implement for revenge is present in the person of the silly Roderigo, who, madly enamoured of Desdemona, is easily flattered by Iago into a belief that when she is tired of the Moor she will fall back upon her discarded lover. Such is Iago's diagnosis of the situation, and he supports it by a course of reasoning which we must feel to be the grossest insult to Desdemona, and even to womanhood itself. Meanwhile money will be necessary, and Roderigo

is contemptuously bidden to fill his purse; and in the absence of his gull Iago works out before us the rough sketch of his monstrous design.

"I hate the Moor;

. . . .

He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now;
To get his place and to plume up my will:
A double knavery.—How, how?—Let's see:—
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engendered. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light."

Poor Othello! How can he escape the wiles of such a villain?

The scene now shifts to Cyprus (Act ii. Scene 1), where, after a stormy passage, the Venetian reinforcements are arriving. The first to land is Cassio, who announces the coming of Othello, and descants in terms of unfeigned but honourable admiration on the beauties of the "divine Desdemona," his new-wedded wife.

"He hath achieved a maid
That paragons description and wild fame;

> One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
> And in the essential vesture of creation
> Does tire the ingener."

The next to land are Desdemona, Emilia, and Iago, and their coming and reception by Cassio lead to a further development both of the plot and of the characters.

To Desdemona, Cassio, in the character of a respectful admirer, offers a most enthusiastic greeting.

> "O, behold,
> The riches of the ship is come on shore!
> Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.
> Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,
> Before, behind thee and on every hand,
> Enwheel thee round."

To Emilia, on the other hand, he offers the more familiar salutation of a kiss.

We now, and for the first time, see Desdemona and Iago together. What will be their attitude? Desdemona is no Rosalind to get the better of Iago in a game at words, as Rosalind comes off victor in a round with Jaques; but her true womanly simplicity stands out in contrast to the distasteful wit of the professed hater of man and despiser of woman. No woman, wise or foolish, fair or foul, escapes his coarse insinuations, and Desdemona, in despair, challenges him what he will say of the woman of true desert, one that would even risk the censure of malice itself. In answer, Iago draws a picture of Desdemona herself.

"*Iago.* She that was ever fair and never proud,
Had tongue at will and yet was never loud,
Never lacked gold and yet went never gay,
Fled from her wish and yet said 'Now I may';
She that being angered, her revenge being nigh,
Bade her wrong stay and her displeasure fly;
She that in wisdom never was so frail
To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail;
She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,
See suitors following and not look behind:
She was a wight, if such a wight there were——
Desd. To do what?
Iago. To suckle fools and chronicle small beer."

That is, the nursery and the pantry are the only spheres of woman's influence.

Meanwhile the charm of Desdemona's presence has begun to have its influence upon Cassio, and Iago marks with satisfaction the lieutenant's attentions to the wife of his chief. A man of Cassio's gallantry is exactly to his purpose. While the group converses, Othello has effected his landing, and his greeting to Desdemona shows no diminution in the ardour of his passion. Indeed, there is about him such a satisfaction as in Greek philosophy preluded the intervention of Nemesis.

"If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."

He has reached the point where, as Bacon put it, "It is

a miserable state of mind to have few things to desire and many things to fear." It is his real wedding-day.

Othello, Desdemona, and their attendants having withdrawn to their quarters, Iago takes up the threads of his villainous plot. The sight of happiness in others produces in a nature such as his an intense feeling of exasperation. Like Satan in Paradise beholding the joys of Adam and Eve, he feels it to be for him

> "Sight hateful, sight tormenting! Thus these two,
> Imparadised in one another's arms,
> The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
> Of bliss on bliss; while I to hell am thrust,
> Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
> Among our other torments not the least,
> Still unfulfilled, with pain of longing pines!"

His scruples, if he has any, vanish, and pure malignity takes their place. The first thing to be done is to spur into activity the sluggish soul of Roderigo. Jealousy of Cassio, hatred of the Moor, and hope of success with Desdemona are all brought into play to inflame his passion; but Iago is careful to reveal to Roderigo only so much of his plan as seems advisable. He tells him that the first step towards his success is to secure the removal of Cassio. This will serve both their ends. Iago will be made lieutenant, and Cassio, being in disgrace with the general, will be barred from access to Desdemona. Thus the way will be left clear for Roderigo when, as Iago asserts with confidence, her affection for the Moor cools. Observe that Iago

never entertains the slightest doubt that, if temptation is put in their way, Cassio, Roderigo, and Desdemona will succumb to it. His business is merely to provide opportunity, and the devil will do the rest.

The plan Iago has formed for immediate action is simple enough. It is Cassio's business to see to the guard. Iago, as ancient, gives orders to Roderigo to take up his post on the watch. When Cassio comes to inspect the sentries, Roderigo, by some infringement of discipline, must provoke him to anger. Iago will be at hand to heat the quarrel, and if only a mutiny can be compassed Cassio's dismissal is certain. Everything turns out according to his mind. The proclamation of festivity (Act ii. Scene 2) in honour of the destruction of the Turkish fleet by the storm, and of the marriage of the general, gives the excuse for conviviality. Cassio (Act ii. Scene 3), who has no head for liquor, is by the wiles of Iago drawn on to exceed the limits of discretion, and is in this condition when he receives from Roderigo the arranged provocation. A *mêlée* follows. Othello is called up, and coming upon the scene at once cashiers his lieutenant, to whom the responsibility for the disturbance had been brought home by a speech of the seemingly reluctant Iago, who contrives to completely cover up from view the relations between himself and Roderigo.

> " Touch me not so near :
> I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth
> Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio ;

Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth
Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general.
Montano and myself being in speech,
There comes a fellow crying out for help;
And Cassio following him with determined sword
To execute upon him."

Not a word of the fellow's being Iago's dupe Roderigo.

"Sir, this gentleman [*i.e.* Montano]
Steps in to Cassio, and entreats his pause;
Myself the crying fellow did pursue,"

(A lie; he had urged Roderigo to go and rouse the town.)

"Lest by his clamour—as it so fell out—
The town might fall in fright: he, swift of foot,
Outran my purpose; and I returned the rather [sooner]
For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,
And Cassio high in oath; which till to-night
I ne'er might say before. When I came back—
For this was brief—I found them close together,
At blow and thrust: even as again they were
When you yourself did part them.
More of that matter cannot I report.
But men are men; the best sometimes forget:
Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,
As men in rage strike those that wish them best,
Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received
From him that fled some strange indignity,
Which patience could not pass."

Now we should remark that, so far as the bystanders know, every word in this speech is true. One person only could detect its falseness, and that is the absent

Roderigo. So certain even is Iago of his success that he can afford to add the faint extenuation of Cassio's action, which only serves to give the false impression that he has understated rather than exaggerated his fault. He gauges Othello truly. Justice seemed satisfied. Cassio stood silent; and, overwhelmed with his fault, he was not in a condition to show up Iago's *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*. Othello, having satisfied himself by asking Cassio what he had to say, and being completely taken in by the cunning of Iago, gives his sentence.

> "I know, Iago,
> Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
> Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee;
> But never more be officer of mine."

So Iago has gained his point in the degradation of his rival. He has yet to have his revenge on Othello.

Part II

In our last study we saw how Iago has contrived to bring about the degradation of his rival Cassio. We know, however, that this success is only regarded by him as a prelude to a greater achievement, namely, the undoing of Desdemona, or at any rate the putting the Moor "into so strong a jealousy that judgment cannot cure." At the close of Scene 1, Act ii., Iago has disclosed his general intention, but like a consummate

villain as he is, he leaves the details of his plot to be worked out or modified as circumstances may arise. The first necessity of the situation is that Cassio be retained about the headquarters of the general. To effect this, Iago with unblushing effrontery (Act ii. Scene 3) represents himself as the friend of the cashiered officer, worms himself into his confidence, ascertains that Cassio was ignorant of Roderigo's person, tells him of a notable plan conceived by him for Cassio's restoration, and in short advises him to make his appeal to Desdemona, whose good nature will be readily won over to act the part of mediator.

Left to himself, Iago makes no secret of his intentions. By means of advice which truly enough suggests the best means for Cassio's restoration, he draws that officer into a course of action that will lead him into a situation which may be represented to the Moor as compromising both to himself and to Desdemona.

> "And what's he then that says I play the villain ;
> When this advice is free I give, and honest,
> Probal to thinking, and, indeed, the course
> To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
> The inclining Desdemona to subdue
> In any honest suit : she's framed as fruitful
> As the free elements.
> . . . . . .
> How am I, then, a villain,
> To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
> Directly to his good?"

Such is the outward appearance of the action; but his

real object is very different. "For while this honest fool plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes, and she for him pleads strongly to the Moor," he will, under the guise of a friend, pour into Othello's ear the pestilential notion that Desdemona's real object is a guilty love for Cassio, and so

> ". . . by how much she strives to do him good,
> She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
> So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
> And out of her own goodness make the net
> That shall enmesh them all."

Such is Iago's plan, and in it he is fully seconded by the zeal of Cassio himself. Day has hardly broke before that officer was at the general's quarters (Act iii. Scene 1) and had gained the ear of Iago's wife Emilia, who in her quality of Desdemona's waiting-woman readily agreed to further his request, and by her advice a private interview (Act iii. Scene 3) is granted to Cassio by Desdemona. As was likely enough, Cassio, who may well have felt the embarrassment of an interview with his angry commander, on sight of the general hurriedly brings the meeting to a close and slinks away, not, however, before Iago, who is in company with the commander, has maliciously drawn the attention of Othello to the identity of the departing figure. With perfect innocence Desdemona chooses this somewhat inopportune moment to press Cassio's claims upon her husband. That the vanished suitor was Cassio she makes no manner of concealment. With honest eagerness she presses her

suit, and Othello, apparently glad for an excuse to relax his severity, readily complies.

> "Pr'ythee, no more: let him come when he will;
> I will deny thee nothing."

There is one phrase that Desdemona has used which has specially caught the observant ear of Iago, "What! Michael Cassio, that came a-wooing with you"; and no sooner has Desdemona left the scene than he with a slight suggestion of deferential hesitation inquires from Othello whether Cassio had been the confidant of his love-making days. "Certainly" is the gist of Othello's answer; and then Iago, with the skill of a consummate hypocrite who has taken to heart every maxim of cunning, contrives, partly by unconnected suggestions, partly by an apparent reluctance to answer inquiries, but more than all by the subtler devices of manner and expression, to instil into Othello the idea that he himself is the possessor of some secret respecting Cassio's character which makes him apprehensive of the perfect honesty of his present intentions. By subtle steps he draws from Othello his views on matrimonial jealousy, and learns to his delight that Othello, confident in the complete integrity of Desdemona, regards jealousy of her as an absurdity.

> "'Tis not to make me jealous,
> To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company;
> Is free of speech; sings, plays, and dances well:
> Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
> Nor from my own weak merits will I draw

> The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt :
> For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago :
> I'll see before I doubt ; when I doubt, prove ;
> And on the proof, there is no more but this,—
> Away at once with love or jealousy ! "

Shakespeare here contrives to place in sharpest contrast the characters of Iago and Othello. Othello is a man of action, Iago of thought. Othello's notions of things are plain, straightforward, and honourable. Iago, on the other hand, is in the first place a thinker ; he has spent his time in probing the subtleties of human nature, and has in the art of playing upon the feelings of mankind a devilish dexterity. It is this which enables him to place Othello at a disadvantage ; for Othello has given up the feelings as the true basis on which to rest his perfect confidence in Desdemona's integrity, and has been won over to submit her constancy to an intellectual test. To say nothing of the folly of such conduct in such a matter, Othello was the last man in the world to be a judge of intellectual distinctions, and therein lies his weakness. For though to prove Desdemona to be unfaithful was beyond the power of man, for she was not so, to create a situation in which there was a certain plausibility of guilt was easy enough for a man of Iago's resource, and Othello had now staked his peace of mind upon the hazard that in any given case he could distinguish satisfactorily to himself between probability and proof. Having achieved this success, Iago carries his siege to Othello's confidence a step further and

openly suggests that the cause of his moving in the matter is his anxiety lest his friend Othello should be blind to the suspicions excited in Iago's mind by the relations of Desdemona and Cassio; and while he protests that he has no ground for anything more than suspicion he contrives to fill Othello's mind with the notion that as in the case of Cassio, Iago is, for reasons of his own, bent on minimising his information. With deadly aim he directs the shafts of his reasoning against the weak point in Othello's armour, viz. the suspicion which years of Ishmaelitism had created, that cut off as he was from mankind, Desdemona's sacrifice of herself for love could only be a temporary delusion from which sooner or later reaction was inevitable, and he contrives to recall to Othello's mind the warning of old Brabantio.

> "Look to her, Moor, if you have eyes to see :
> She hath deceived her father, and may thee."

The blindness of love is proverbial. The question is what it has failed to see.

The terrible effect of Iago's cursed insinuations is shown in the Moor's soliloquy.

> "Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless
> Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds."

To him it appears as if he had really awakened from sleep; love is no longer blind as he runs over to himself the faults in himself, which made Desdemona's preference for him a freak of nature; his blackness, his

deficiency in the matter of small talk, his declining years, all these seem to him in a new light, not as before the entrancements of his delight in Desdemona's love, but as the fuel of the suspicions which have already begun to rack him. Nor is it possible to feel anything but pity for the bewildered man. Iago's subtlety, though known to us, was absolutely unsuspected by Othello. Nor had there been a flaw in Iago's consummate acting by which even a much abler man than Othello could have detected the wolf in sheep's clothing who was disturbing his peace of mind. As Milton says of one even greater in villainy than Iago :—

> "So spake the false dissembler unperceived ;
> For neither man nor angel can discern
> Hypocrisy—the only evil that walks
> Invisible, except to God alone,
> By His permissive will, through heaven and earth ;
> And oft, though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
> At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
> Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
> Where no ill seems."

At the climax of his agitation Desdemona enters, and the purity of her presence at once dispels the cloud of intellectual doubt. For herself she has no suspicions ; concern for her husband's evident agitation alone occupies her thoughts. His temples are throbbing. She will bind them with her handkerchief. Alas ! it proves too short for the purpose, and Othello recovering his equanimity, they go out together, and the needless hand-

kerchief drops to the floor, unheeded by its owner. In an instant it is in Emilia's hands.

> "I am glad I have found this napkin:
> This was her first remembrance from the Moor."

Iago has often incited her to steal it, but Desdemona

> "so loves the token
> (For he conjured her she would ever keep it),
> That she reserves it evermore about her,
> To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out [copied]
> And give it Iago.
> What he'll do with it, heaven knows, not I:
> I nothing but to please his fantasy;"

and Iago coming in at the moment, the treasure-trove is at once handed over to him. What he will do with it is immediately apparent. His game is to leave it in Cassio's lodgings, and if it falls into Cassio's hands it may be used as a further confirmation of the Moor's suspicions, for

> "Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmations strong
> As proofs of holy writ."

Meanwhile Othello has fallen into the jealousy that Iago had predicted. His whole being is tortured with doubt. In Desdemona's presence belief in her is part of his nature; away from her, the intellectual uncertainty into which Iago has led him proves altogether too much for his manly but unsophisticated intelligence. As he said at the first suggestion of doubt, "When I love thee not, chaos is come again." For such a man as Othello,

to preserve the intellectual condition of suspension of judgment was an impossible feat. When in doubt, he could have no rest till he was resolved. One way or another he must know the truth. Uncertainty was moral torture. With the agony of despair he calls on Iago to put him out of his misery. If he fails to make good the suspicions he has aroused, woe upon his life. With the guilelessness of a man of honour, he appeals to Iago's honesty.

> "If thou dost slander her and torture me,
> Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
> On horror's head horrors accumulate;
> Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed;
> For nothing canst thou to damnation add
> Greater than that."

But effective as such an appeal might be in dealing with a man of honour, it is utterly lost upon Iago. Indeed, Othello's threat only stirs him to greater efforts of dissimulation, and with the art of a consummate hypocrite he meets Othello's rising suspicions with an ostentatious display of unusual candour. Let Othello take his office if he will. If this is the reward of a man who has so loved his friend as to jeopardise his place, henceforth Iago will have no friend. Othello is again deceived, and again implores Iago to resolve his doubts.

> "By the world,
> I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
> I think that thou art just, and think thou art not
> I'll have some proof."

Proof! retorts Iago. In such a case a fool would ask for proof. Circumstantial evidence only is possible. You will have to make up your mind by the weighing of probabilities. With such proofs, meaning little in themselves but each fitting firmly into the chain of evidence which Othello was forming, Iago was ready. Cassio in his dreams had talked of Desdemona. Othello's handkerchief has been seen in Cassio's hands.

To any man whose intelligence was unblinded by passion the evidence was worthless. For when divested of Iago's cloud of suspicion it resolved itself into four points. First, Cassio's hasty disappearance on Othello's approach; second, Desdemona's display of special interest in Cassio's reinstatement; third, Cassio's dreamy talk; and fourth, the handkerchief being seen in his possession. Of these we know that the first and second were capable of a perfectly natural explanation. The third was a mere assertion of Iago's, which in the nature of things could not be supported by corroborative evidence. The fourth certainly was suspicious, but contained nothing which excluded a natural explanation. The most ordinary advocate would have pulled to pieces the case for the prosecution, but Othello's mind was incapable of steady thought. Judgment can no longer cure his distemper. Even setting aside the weakness of the proof, a worse man than Othello would have seen the fairness at any rate of further investigation. On a former occasion Othello had asked Cassio what he had to say; but now, with an infatuation which even we,

who have watched Iago's subtleties from the beginning, find hard to palliate, he allows himself to give orders to Iago for the assassination of his old companion; declares his intention of wreaking capital vengeance on Desdemona herself; and as an earnest of his complete trust in Iago, promotes him to the vacant post of lieutenant. Yet the Moor's position is a hard one. Even Desdemona (Act iii. Scene 4) admits that a man of jealous mind might have been excited by finding its loss.

> "Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse
> Full of crusadoes: and, but my noble Moor
> Is true of mind and made of no such baseness
> As jealous creatures are, it were enough
> To put him to ill thinking."

Hardly has this thought suggested itself to her mind when Othello comes upon the scene, and unluckily the first person she mentions is Cassio. Othello meets her by explaining the magical powers with which the handkerchief had been endowed. She, horrified at the seriousness of her loss, and now too frightened to confess it, tries to put him off by urging the claims of Cassio, till at last Othello, unable to control the tide of his emotion, flings himself out of the room. The horrible truth dawns on Desdemona. Her husband *is* jealous. He is thoroughly angry, and she feels instinctively that further advocacy of Cassio's suit is for the moment out of the question.

Emilia, who knows at any rate where the handker-

chief was lost, stands by without speaking. Emilia is represented as the first gull of her husband Iago. Though she does not know the extent of his wickedness, she is well aware of her impotence to control him, and instinctively she fears his anger. All she dare do is to put Desdemona upon her guard as to Othello's jealousy, and to hope for the best. Meanwhile the adventures of the unlucky handkerchief are not at an end, for Cassio has passed it on to his mistress Bianca, with a request that she will copy the pattern before the owner is discovered.

Everything seems to be working into Iago's hands. Nor is that villain himself idle. He knows that his poison will work quickest in a passionate mind, and having heard from Desdemona of Othello's anger, he hurries off to ply him with his lies (Act iv. Scene 1). Cassio, he says, has confessed all. No longer is there any room for doubt. Again Othello fails to distinguish between probability and proof, and in the miserable conviction of his disgrace, falls into a trance. The one thing Iago still feared was a personal encounter between Cassio and Othello, when Cassio's explanations might upset all his schemes; and here such a meeting is within an ace of occurring, for while Othello is unconscious Cassio comes up. Afraid of what might happen if Othello, on recovering consciousness, discovered himself in Cassio's care, Iago contrives by an excuse to get rid of him, and then with the utmost dexterity seizing the opportunity that offered, he contrived that Othello

should play the eavesdropper to a conversation between Cassio and himself. Of course, Iago turns the conversation upon Bianca, but contrives that her name should not be mentioned, so that Othello should take what was said as referring to Desdemona. Even then Cassio uses a phrase which would have shown any man capable of discrimination that Desdemona could not be the subject of the conversation; but Othello's ears have lost their cunning. Worse than all, he learns from Bianca's mouth that his magical handkerchief had been given her by Cassio. Of course this was no evidence against Desdemona, for it had not been proved that she had given it to Cassio; but again Othello mistakes suspicion for evidence. No punishment can be too severe for the culprits. He would "have Cassio nine years a-killing." Desdemona he would chop to pieces—kill her with poison—strangle her in her bed. Iago himself will undertake the punishment of Cassio.

Shakespeare now introduces a scene of which the design appears to be the informing of the spectators as to Othello's appearance in the eyes of the public. Lodovico, cousin to Desdemona, arrives with letters from the senate, importing the recall of the Moor and the promotion of Cassio to the post of governor. An unlucky question of Lodovico's as to the ill-will between Othello and his successor leads to Desdemona's innocent remark, "A most unhappy one. I would do much to atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio." The very publicity of the words proves their innocence, but in

Othello they excite an ungovernable passion. In his rage he strikes Desdemona. He can only be pacified by her exit. In a frenzy of anger he imagines unspeakable things, and flings himself from the room.

It is to the ubiquitous Iago that the astonished Lodovico turns for an explanation.

> "Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
> Call all-in-all sufficient? Is this the nature
> Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
> The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
> Could neither graze nor pierce?
> . . . . . .
> Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?
> . . . . . .
> What, strike his wife!
> . . . . . .
> Is it his use?
> Or did the letters work upon his blood
> And new-create this fault?"

Such is Othello when, as he foretold, his love for Desdemona has vanished and chaos has come again.

But can nothing undeceive him? Will no one open his eyes to the truth? The next scene is designed to answer the question. Before action Othello thinks it well to cross-examine his wife's attendant Emilia (Act iv. Scene 2). She denies utterly the truth of his suspicions. There was a time, ere Iago's poison had done its work, when Othello would have grasped eagerly at this evidence. It now comes too late. Emilia's protestations only confirm his suspicion that all man-

kind but Iago are against him. Emilia's passionate asseverations—

> "I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
> Lay down my soul at stake: if you think other,
> Remove your thought; it doth abuse your bosom.
> If any wretch have put this in your head,
> Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!
> For, if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
> There's no man happy; the purest of their wives
> Is foul as slander"

—are turned aside, with the remark that any fool can tell a lie to save herself; and, more convinced than ever, he summons Desdemona to his presence. With her returns Emilia. With a coarse jest he sends Emilia back. Gesture and words alike are terrifying to Desdemona. His "horrible fancies" transform the whole man. It is in vain that she protests herself "his true and loyal wife"—Othello is far past the stage of investigation. He does not even think it necessary to particularise the person whom he suspects. His mind is all confusion, and yet through it all the nobility of the man breaks out into speech which, had Desdemona been the thing he thought she was, would have appealed to the most cynical of mankind. Again he flings himself away, and Iago returns to gloat over the ruin he has made.

Meantime the necessity for despatch is hurrying Iago along. Self-preservation compels him to finish what he had begun. Even a heart less steeled than his would have been proof against appeal; for, as we now learn,

Roderigo has turned upon his employer, and threatens to make himself known to Desdemona, and to demand what has become of the jewels with which he has supplied Iago — which jewels were to be used as presents for Desdemona, and which Iago has constantly assured him that Desdemona had graciously received. Iago does not hesitate a moment. Roderigo is told off to murder Cassio as the only method of detaining Othello, and therefore Desdemona, in Cyprus. Iago himself will be assistant to his design. A few hours now and Iago's success will be complete. Desdemona and Cassio will both be dead, and the proofs of their innocence will perish with them. Roderigo may be disposed of too; then who will so naturally take rule in Cyprus as Iago himself?

Meantime the clouds of impending catastrophe are beginning to settle around Desdemona. Her talk (Act iv. Scene 3) is of dying for love. Her bed to-night shall be made with her bridal sheets. Her eyes itch, and she takes it to forbode weeping. Her mind runs upon her husband's accusation. Like Ophelia, she has learned that "there be tricks i' the world"; but the difference in tone between her and her attendant when they discuss these matters serves only to bring out into clearer light the purity of Desdemona's soul.

From this moment the action of the play is very rapid. Roderigo, from his ambush (Act v. Scene 1), hits at Cassio, but his sword is turned aside by the suit of armour which that officer is accustomed to wear

beneath his clothes. Worse than that, Cassio's stroke is more effective, and Roderigo falls wounded. Iago, however, is by to aid; and though he cannot kill Cassio without showing himself, he contrives from behind to deal him a cruel blow on the leg, and in the confusion that follows makes sure of Roderigo by another thrust. So far things have gone well with him, and one more success fortune has in store. Cassio has not recognised him, so that, Roderigo being dead and Cassio like to die, one part of his plot has been successfully performed.

In Scene 2, Act v., we return to the castle. Desdemona is asleep, and Othello is steeling himself to execute his vengeance. What is the spirit in which he sets about it? His love for her is not extinct. Were he and she alone in the world he might yet forgive her,

"Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men."

Her death, therefore, is a sacrifice which he owes to humanity. She wakes. He will not kill her unconfessed. But Desdemona has no confession to make. When Othello, for the first time, accuses her of guilt with Cassio, she denies it utterly. But the denial comes too late, and serves merely to exasperate her husband.

"O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart,
And makest me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:
I saw the handkerchief.
Desd. He found it, then;
I never gave it him: send for him hither—
Let him confess a truth.
Othello. He hath confessed."

Desdemona is horrified at the words. It is impossible that it can be true: "He will not say so." But Cassio's life is gone.

> "His mouth is stopped;
> Honest Iago hath ta'en order for it.
> . . . . .
> *Desd.* Alas! he is betrayed, and I undone."

This unfortunate phrase, which is interpreted by Othello as a confession, seals her fate. All her pleadings for mercy are in vain. Not a night, not an hour will he grant—not even time for the saying of a prayer. She must die in her sin, "unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled"; and, furious with anger, he stifles her.

Hardly is her panting ceased when the horror of the deed forces itself upon the mind of Othello. What is done is irrevocable, and what if it were better undone?

> "Cassio, my lord, hath killed a young Venetian
> Called Roderigo,"

and "Cassio is not killed."

But Desdemona is not dead. She breathes, she speaks. All may yet be well. Alas! it is too late. Her life is ebbing, yet in dying, her one thought is to save her murderer.

> "*Emil.* O, who hath done this deed?
> *Desd.* Nobody; I myself. Farewell:
> Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!"

For a moment it looks as if Othello would take advantage of the mode of escape thus offered him; but he disdains to do so. "'Twas I that killed her," he

says, and in an instant learns from Emilia the error he had made. While yet in the agony of the discovery, Iago and a group of officers enter, and an angry altercation between Emilia and Iago follows. Iago attempts to brazen it out, strikes his wife dead and then runs for his life. But his hour is come at last,—a rush of officers, and he is a prisoner. Othello is the first to strike him down. But he is not dead, and is reserved for tortures more cruel still. Evidence of his guilt accumulates. Papers found in Iago's pockets, combined with Cassio's assertions, convince Othello of his gigantic mistake. For him no future remains. Death only can atone for his crime, and he inflicts the punishment with his own hand.

In dealing with the problem laid before us by Shakespeare, we have to ask ourselves, What is the primary cause of the catastrophe which has been laid before us? What a catastrophe it has been! Desdemona, Emilia, Roderigo murdered; Othello slain by his own hand; Brabantio gone, broken-hearted, to his grave. Cassio and Iago alone are left, and Iago's life is soon to terminate amidst the horrid tortures of sixteenth-century ingenuity. The knavery of Iago is clearly the special cause of all; but there must be something deeper than this, for Shakespeare never allows punishment to fall upon persons who are alike innocent both of crime and of mistake. We inquire, then, What is the prime cause? We find it, I believe, in the unsuitability of the marriage itself. That like should

wed like is a fundamental rule of Shakespearian morality. For, setting aside the mere external differences of colour, age, and the like, what is at the bottom of Othello's misfortune? Surely it is this: Othello and his wife have and can have no real community of feeling. Admiration founded on sympathy with misfortune on the one hand, and love founded upon thankfulness for such pity on the other, cannot, in the opinion of Shakespeare, form a permanent basis for marriage. To explain how this is shown in the play is more difficult than to perceive it; but for myself, I feel most strongly the existence of a want of complete unison of feeling between the two. Perhaps it is more a want of unison on the mental than on the moral side. In feeling Othello and Desdemona are alike strong; but in intellectuality they are weak. At critical moments neither has the intellectual subtlety to pierce through the maze that surrounds them. Othello is a child in the hands of Iago; Desdemona is equally unable to present her case to Othello. Her assertions carry with them conviction to the audience, but they have not the subtlety of fence needful to undermine the confidence felt by Othello. Nor have they lived in the same social sphere. Desdemona is a girl accustomed to move freely in Venetian society—a society never remarkable for the strictness of its etiquette. She carried with her the freedom of the Western woman. Othello, on the other hand, though himself a Christian, is essentially an Eastern. His violence of passion, his innate disposition

to jealousy, his inability to realise the existence of Platonic affection between the sexes, stamps the man. Shakespeare knew well enough that the prejudices of race are not eradicated in a moment. He agrees with those who think that to find a Tartar you have only to scratch a Russian. He was well aware, too, that there is no quality which the Eastern finds so hard to cast off as suspicion. It is part of the very blood of the uncivilised man. Trust in one's fellow-creatures is a feeling which can be built up upon nothing less than the experience of centuries. Even had Othello been capable of trust, there was no one but Iago on whom he could rely. Under ordinary circumstances he would have disclosed his suspicions to Cassio; but here Cassio's help was out of the question, so that Iago was his only friend.

Upon such a character as this, unversed in intellectual fence, unskilled in the etiquette of society, prone to jealousy, Iago is able with crushing effect to bring his cunning to bear. In every point where Othello is weak Iago is strong. He has a complete hold over the inner life. He knows to a hair his own strength and Othello's weakness. His temper, unlike that of Othello, is completely under his control. His knowledge of society, though not that of a man of fashion, is that of the thorough-paced cynic. Like Jaques, he is a master of the weaker side of life. He has observed every age of man and woman, and found all alike weak. Place such a man in antagonism to Othello, and it is certain

which will fall in the struggle. Let us note, too, the art with which Shakespeare indicates the character of Iago. He shows how he has trained himself by petty victories —first shall we say over Emilia, then over Roderigo, then over Cassio, and finally over the Moor himself. It is a melancholy catalogue of human weakness, and leaves in one's mind an unpleasant feeling of the instability of mankind.

CORIOLANUS

Part I

In treating the well-known story of Caius of Corioli, Shakespeare, as in the play of *Julius Cæsar*, had before him two lines of inquiry. In the first place, he had to investigate and exhibit the character of Coriolanus himself, its virtues and its vices. In the second, he had to make intelligible to an English audience that condition of Roman society which made the catastrophe of the story possible. And in doing this, doubtless he desired to intermingle such portions of political philosophy as he himself, in his capacity of an English citizen, found applicable to his own surroundings.

The opening scene (Act i. Scene 1) is designed to give us an insight into the character of the populace of Rome and their estimate of the great patrician warrior Caius Marcius. We learn that it is a time of famine—the recurrent difficulty in the Roman State, which had no manufactures or commerce, and whose agricultural resources were frequently inadequate to the support of its population. As is commonly the case with unedu-

cated persons, the tendency to fasten upon an individual the responsibility for disasters that arise out of general causes, makes the sufferers impute their misery to Caius Marcius, exactly as in the French Revolution the Parisians believed that could they only secure the persons of Louis XVI and his family, the price of bread would assuredly fall. Could Marcius be removed, all would go well. "Let us kill him," they say, "and we'll have corn at our own price." The arguments which Shakespeare puts into the mouths of the citizens have been the stock-in-trade of agitators in all ages; and have lost none of their popularity—"What authority surfeits on would relieve us"; "The leanness that afflicts us, the object [that is, the sight] of our misery, is as an inventory to particularise their abundance"; "Our sufferance is a gain to them."

However, as regards what is best to be done, the crowd are not wholly of one mind. One citizen objects to making an individual a scapegoat, and that a citizen whose services have deserved well of the State; protests against "a maliciousness" which imputes even his good actions to pride; and raises a difficult question of casuistry by saying, "What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him." Because Marcius is proud it does not follow that he is covetous, and it is on this that their present hostility to him is based. That his guiding motive is partly "to please his mother," and partly the fruit of his own pride, has nothing to do with the present famine.

These arguments, however, which appeal not to passion but to reason, have little effect, and the citizens, urged on by shouts which tell them that the other side of the city has risen, are in full career towards the Capitol, when they meet with Menenius Agrippa. Though a patrician, Menenius has with the populace the reputation of "an honest man, who has always loved the people"; and Shakespeare makes them willing to be led by a man of superior position, though they will not listen to the arguments of one of themselves. Menenius begins by calling attention to the obvious consideration that the famine is the work of the gods, not of the patricians, and asserts also that the patricians, whom he calls "the helms" or pilots of the State, care for them as fathers. This statement provokes from the 1st Citizen an outburst of indignation. "Care for us! True, indeed," he ironically exclaims. "They never cared for us yet: suffer us to famish, and their storehouses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury, to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich; and provide more piercing statutes daily, to chain up and restrain the poor! If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us." To this Menenius replies that either they must be very foolish, or else determined to see evil whether it exist or no; and to make his point clearer he relates the ancient fable of the belly and the members. He had hardly given the accusation made by the members against the belly, and was proceeding to give its answer, than the

1st Citizen took the words out of his mouth, and, in a way which Menenius could hardly have ventured upon, made the accusations of the members his own.

"What!
The kingly-crowned head, the vigilant eye,
The counsellor-heart, the arm our soldier,
Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter;
. . . . . .
If that they
Should by the cormorant belly be restrained,
Who is the sink o' the body,—
. . . . . .
What could the belly answer?"

Menenius, with ready irony, was prompt in his reply.

"Note me this, good friend;
Your most grave belly was deliberate,
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answered,—
'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,
'That I receive the general food at first,
Which you do live upon: and fit it is,
Because I am the storehouse and the shop
Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood,
Even to the court, the heart; to the seat o' the brain;
And, through the cranks and offices of man,
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins
From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live. And though that all at once
. . . . . cannot
See what I do deliver out to each,
Yet I can make my audit up, that all
From me do back receive the flour of all,
And leave me but the bran.'"

Menenius leaves nothing to chance, so he does not fail to point the moral of his story—

> "The senators of Rome are this good belly,
> And you the mutinous members; for examine
> Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
> Touching the weal o' the common, you shall find
> No public benefit which you receive
> But it proceeds, or comes, from them to you,
> And no way from yourselves."

This preliminary scene is designed by Shakespeare to illustrate, first, the principles which in his opinion regulated the well-being of a State, which, if it is to present a firm front to rivals, must not be divided against itself. The interdependence of all classes must be fully recognised, for we may recollect that the story of the belly and its members may be made to tell the other way, if it happened that the digestive organs were recalcitrant or neglectful. Moreover, the incident, like the speeches of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Cæsar*, serves the purpose of showing what in Shakespeare's opinion was the right way to deal with the rabble. Appeals to the reason, as shown by the uselessness of the suggestions of the 2d Citizen, were futile. Homely illustration, humorously and good-temperedly delivered, was the truer method of dealing with the uneducated. Had the patricians been all of the type of Menenius, the friction between the different classes in the State would have been reduced to a minimum. Unfortunately Menenius was an exception to his class, and the opposite but

prevailing type of its spirit is introduced in Caius Marcius, whom the plebeians have already singled out as the representative of the patrician class.

His opening address marks sufficiently the contrast between the two. While with Menenius the populace are "his countrymen," "my good friends," "honest neighbours," and his only abuse is levied on the professional agitator, whom he ridicules as "the great toe" of the rebellion, with Marcius they are "dissentient rogues," "curs," "hares," "geese." While Menenius has been studious to point out the beneficent action of the patrician caste, and their importance as providing work and wages for the poor, Marcius speaks of the function of the Senate as being that of those who,

> "Under the gods, keep you in awe, which else
> Would feed on one another."

Marcius had exactly the virtues and failings of the member of a dominant aristocratic class. He does not scruple to proclaim his contempt for the vices of his subordinates, and to taunt them to their faces "with inconstancy," and with the lack of perception of what was and was not justice, which made them make heroes of criminals.

> "Your virtue is
> To make him worthy whose offence subdues him,
> And curse that justice did it.
> . . . . . .
> With every minute you do change a mind,
> And call him noble that was now your hate,
> Him vile that was your garland."

His sole idea of control is to use threats. Would the Senate let him, he would pile, a lance-throw high, a hecatomb of corpses. What moves him to most contempt of all is the concession with which the other group of rebels have been satisfied. They have asked for bread, and have received in exchange five tribunes. Not that Marcius does not see the effect of this concession. It may not add to the stock of corn, but by giving consistency to the demands of the populace, and enabling them to act as a whole, it must inevitably "in time win upon power." It will be made a basis for the demand of further concessions. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the creation of this new power was equally disliked both by Marcius and Menenius. Marcius would have fought ere he would have granted it, Menenius would have appeased the multitude without allowing concession to have become inevitable.

Meanwhile, the division in Rome encouraged a renewal of activity on the part of its hereditary foe the Volscians, who under Tullus Aufidius, an old antagonist of Caius Marcius, are in arms. The initiative in dealing with this difficulty is, of course, taken by the patricians, who show themselves to be not only the belly, but also the brains and arms of the State. Titus Lartius and Cominius, the consuls, are told off to lead the army, and Marcius, though he is in estimation the best soldier of the day, with the instinct of a member of a true military caste, and to the surprise of the commons, accepts a subordinate position. The patricians then

retire to the Capitol, and the citizens, according to stage directions, "steal away" to their homes. Even the two new tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, take no part in the warlike preparations, but stay behind to discuss the character of Marcius.

We have now a third view of Marcius's character. The patricians clearly take him for the champion both of themselves and the State. The populace, though they hate him for his pride, cannot but admit the superiority of his valour. What is the view of the professional agitators, as Shakespeare, had he lived nowadays, would doubtless have dubbed his tribunes? Their one wish is that "the present wars may devour him." Their hope is that he is "too proud to be so valiant." His conduct in consenting to serve under Cominius is imputed by them to motives of selfishness, and to the belief that if the campaign be a failure, Cominius will have blame; if a success, the praise will go to himself. Such is the agitator's estimate of the virtues of those by whom he is overshadowed.

The scene next shifts to Corioli (Act i. Scene 2), where Tullus is found with equal resolution preparing to take the field, and then (Act. i. Scene 3) to the house of Marcius, where we learn something of the light in which he is regarded at home. The leading character is his mother, Volumnia. She is designed to be typical of the Roman matron, more careful of the honour of her son than of his life, while Virgilia, his wife, represents the tenderness of womanhood, unhardened by the

discipline which had formed Volumnia. With them is Marcius's son, young Marcius, who represents as a child the pride and impatience of failure which are the characteristics of the father. His pleasure is in action.

"He has such a confirmed countenance! I saw him run after a gilded butterfly; and when he caught it he let it go again; and after it again; and over and over he comes, and up again; catched it again; or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it."

Report has it that the Romans are besieging Corioli; and the different characters of mother-in-law and daughter are well displayed in the form which their anxiety takes. The mother must be doing something: the daughter prefers to stay at home and wait.

The next scenes (Act i. Scenes 6-9), though they advance the story, do little to increase our knowledge of the characters. It is a fighting piece, and as little satisfactory as any stage representations of general combats must necessarily be; but it shows us in actual display the valour of Marcius; the inability of the Roman populace to make good soldiers, unless they have a patrician to lead them on; the superiority to mercenary considerations of the Roman officers; and concludes with the capture of Corioli, and the granting to Marcius of the surname Coriolanus.

The last scene, however (Act i. Scene 10), is worthy of more note, for in it Shakespeare gives his audience an insight into the character of Tullus Aufidius. His tone was altogether lower than that of the Roman hero, and

the author indicates this by making him incapable of bearing defeat. Beaten in the open field, he declares his readiness to resort to treachery.

> "Mine emulation
> Hath not that honour in't it had ; for where
> I thought to crush him in an equal force
> (True sword to sword), I'll potch at him some way
> Or wrath or craft may get him.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nor sleep, nor sanctuary ;
> Being naked, sick ; nor fane, nor Capitol,
> The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifice
> (Embarquements all of fury), shall lift up
> Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst
> My hate to Marcius : where I find him, were it
> At home, upon my brother's guard, even there,
> Against the hospitable canon, would I
> Wash my fierce hand in's heart."

Such sentiments could never come from such a man as Caius Marcius, and it is questionable whether, even having regard to his repeated defeats, they are quite possible from such a man as Aufidius. With all his faults, Marcius is the soul of honour, and no equal need for a moment fear his treachery. Let him beware of putting himself in the power of Tullus Aufidius.

The first scene of Act ii. is devoted by Shakespeare solely to an examination of the characters of the tribunes. We must imagine that the new office has now been put into working order, and that time has been given to judge of its value by the character of its occupants, and the way in which they discharge the

duties of their office. To do this, Shakespeare brings together Brutus and Sicinius, the tribunes, and our old friend Menenius, the enthusiastic admirer of Marcius and the shrewd critic of the failings of the Roman populace. In the interview Brutus and Sicinius sufficiently exhibit themselves, their motives and their intentions. They belong to the class of civic dignitary whom no dignity can dignify. Their conduct on the bench is such as to bring contempt upon the administration of the law.

"When you are hearing a matter between party and party, if you chance to be pinched with the cholic, you make faces like mummers . . . dismiss the controversy bleeding, the more entangled by your hearing: all the peace you make in their cause is, calling both the parties knaves."

Their abuse of Marcius is clearly the product of envy. In their attacks upon him they have no discrimination. They accuse him at once of pride and of boasting, whereas boasting is the characteristic, not of the proud man, but of the vain one. They dislike the idea of his becoming consul, because it will detract from *their* office, from *their* authority. The popularity of his triumph is most galling to the men whose only distinction is their civic rank. And they will be revenged on him too. Their hour will come; when he stands for the consulship, then will be the time to "suggest" to the people the memory of his haughtiness, and to put them in mind of the contempt with which their representatives have been treated. "To

darken him for ever" is the noble object of this brace of demagogues.

The next scene (Act ii. Scene 2) shows Marcius as a candidate for the consulship, to which the triumph, depicted as occurring during the conversation of the tribunes and Menenius, forms the natural prelude. What is thought of his candidature is shown in the conversation of the two attendants at the Senate-house, who, while setting it in order for the election, discuss the chances of the poll. It is in his favour that "he's a brave fellow," but against him that he is "vengeance proud, and loves not the common people." To which it is retorted that popular esteem goes for very little as a criterion of true worth, for "there have been many great men that have flattered the people who ne'er loved them," and "there be many they have loved, they know not wherefore." One attendant shrewdly observes that Coriolanus carries everything by extremes, and that "to affect the malice and displeasure of the people is as bad as that which he dislikes—to flatter them for their love." After all, is the answer, "He hath so planted his honours in their eyes and his actions in their hearts, that for their tongues to be silent and not confess so much were a kind of ungrateful injury"; and with the remark, "He is a worthy man," the conversation of those chance representatives of the people is brought to a close.

As a preliminary to the election, Menenius, so soon as the senators have taken their places, calls upon Cominius to recount the actions of Coriolanus. This he

does at length, and lays special stress on his personal valour, his influence over men, which "by his rare example made the coward turn terror into sport," and his superiority to any greediness of spoil. During this recital, Coriolanus, with the awkwardness characteristic of a proud and haughty warrior, declined to be present, when a vain man would have given his eyes to hear such a speech. When it is over he is recalled, and immediately, with wonderful want of *savoir faire*, asks to be excused from the performance of the usual ceremony observed by candidates in the petitioning for votes in the market-place, on which occasion it was usual to flatter the people by appearing somewhat in the guise of a suppliant, by displaying ancient scars, and by other appeals to popular favour.

We next (Act ii. Scene 3) see Coriolanus in contact with the populace themselves. Of the masses Shakespeare had a much higher opinion than he had of their leaders, and so while he makes Sicinius and Brutus envious, self-satisfied, and tricky, he makes the people ready to recognise merit, doubtful of their own sufficiency, and even wilfully negligent of their own interests. Coriolanus was certainly not an adept at the art of canvassing. He recognised it as an art, and despised it accordingly; as he said himself, when mocking its professors, "I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man, and give it bountifully to the desirers." Shakespeare nowhere indicates that it was a fault in Coriolanus to despise the multitude. Shakespeare him-

self shared the feeling. But, whereas in Shakespeare and in Menenius the attitude was kindly, humorous, and discriminating, Coriolanus made a virtue of flaunting his contempt in the eyes of the multitude, and that too on the least fitting occasions. But, in spite of this, Shakespeare makes the multitude recognise in Coriolanus a real nobility of character. He may be hard upon the people, but verily he is a born leader of men, and to him as such they not only give their suffrages, but wish him "joy, sir, heartily." He has "deserved nobly of his country," and they will not be the first to show him ingratitude. The slightest possible advance upon his part would have made Coriolanus as idolised as was Julius Cæsar.

To Sicinius and Brutus the success of Coriolanus was wormwood itself. The magic power of his nobility had upset all their well-laid plans. We learn from their own mouths that the popular vote had been given in contravention of their express orders. They had "lessoned" the people in the art of interviewing a candidate, and their teaching had been utterly thrown to the winds. Again, the want of prudence in Coriolanus served them; for though under an impulse of admiration they had given their votes, the citizens, irritated by the candidate's manner, were by no means satisfied with their bargain; and it was the existence of this feeling of irritation which the tribunes turned to their own advantage. With the true agitator's cunning, they counsel the populace to recall their suffrages, and

with equally characteristic regard for their own skins, they put into the mouths of the people an explanation which shall not only relieve the tribunes from blame, but shall gain them false credit for having used their official influence in favour of the aristocratic candidate. Nay, even they hurry off to the Capitol with the remark—

> "We will be there before the stream o' the people;
> And this shall seem, as partly 'tis, their own,
> Which we have goaded onward."

With great judgment (Act iii. Scene 1) Shakespeare makes Coriolanus, in assuming the consulship, devote himself to a question of foreign politics. The future movements of the Volsces engage his earnest attention. Under such a consul Rome, at any rate, may sleep secure. But he has hardly got through the business of receiving the report of the newly returned Lartius, when the two tribunes appear on the scene and forbid further proceedings on the ground that the people have recalled their votes. Such an act of vacillation, announced by the tribunes whose persons he despised and whose office he detested, was exactly what was certain to pour forth the vials of Coriolanus's wrath, and Shakespeare puts his view of the situation very tersely in the phrase—

> "It is a purposed thing, and grows by plot,
> To curb the will of the nobility:
> Suffer it, and live with such as cannot rule,
> Nor ever will be ruled."

In this phrase Shakespeare seems to sum up the situation, and enunciate the difficulty which beset the Roman world. It was a State divided against itself. The middle class, which forms the connecting link between the rich and well-born and the poor, hardly existed. The gradations of rank, which in a well-ordered community proceed step by step, were here interrupted by an unbridged gap. In consequence, the two sections of the State, the nobility and the commonalty, were arrayed in separate camps. Unfortunately, this division had lately been accentuated by the creation of the tribunes, men who, as Shakespeare represents them, had none of the instincts of the governing classes, but puffed up by the majesty of their own office, were using their power to make government altogether impossible. Such a state of things, as Coriolanus saw, was fatal to the security of the State; but, unhappily, he himself was wanting in the tact and finesse necessary to deal with an all but hopeless situation. The only man who could have made matters tolerable was old Menenius, who represents the spirit of compromise, not because he had a higher opinion of the people's capacity of government or a greater liking for the self-seeking tribunes, but because he saw that under the circumstances it was necessary to temporise, and to gain time for that well-tried maxim of statesmanship, "*solvitur ambulando*," to come into play. Affairs had arrived at a political crisis; the question was whether Coriolanus, the tribunes, or Menenius would direct the course of events.

Part II

At the conclusion of the former study we saw how both Coriolanus and the tribunes had put themselves in the wrong—Coriolanus by his ostentatious refusal to use the most ordinary decency in his bearing to his inferiors, the tribunes by having "goaded on the people," and then pretended that the outbreak was spontaneous. Each party can see the defects of the other, but is blind to its own. The tribunes are perfectly right when they say of Coriolanus (Act iii. Scene 1)—

> "You speak o' the people
> As if you were a god to punish; not
> A man of their infirmity."

On the other hand, he is perfectly justified in regarding the peremptory "shall" of the tribunes as an attempt to make the tribunate, and not the consulate or the senate, the supreme power.

> "By Jove himself!
> It makes the consuls base: and my soul aches
> To know, when two authorities are up,
> Neither supreme, how soon confusion
> May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take
> The one by the other."

In his anger and fury at the pretensions of the tribunes, Coriolanus calls on the senators to abolish the

office altogether. This, of course, brings upon him an accusation of treason, that is, of attempting by violence to get rid of a fundamental part of the Constitution. An attempt to arrest him on the spot is defeated by a display of force, and Coriolanus is persuaded to go home, while Menenius tries his hand at conciliation. He has already done what he can to allay the storm. He has appealed both to Coriolanus for "patience" and to Sicinius to avoid further irritation. "This is the way to kindle, not to quench." He has tried to appeal to the patriotic instincts of the tribunes, if they have any.

> "Be that you seem, truly your country's friend,
> And temperately proceed to what you would
> Thus violently redress."

To Menenius the incapacity of Coriolanus to "speak the people fair" was simply incomprehensible, and no sooner has he got matters into his own hands than he tries to act upon his advice to others. With him it is "good Sicinius," "worthy tribunes," "good people." He admits that the consul is not without his faults. He tries to recall the sentiment which had made all citizens of Rome proud of Rome's mightiest champion.

> "Now the good gods forbid
> That our renowned Rome, whose gratitude
> Towards her deserved children is enrolled
> In Jove's own book, like an unnatural dam
> Should now eat up her own."

He appeals to the memory of the blood that Coriolanus has shed. Let them proceed by order of law, and not by violence. "Noble tribunes, it is the humane way." Such language was completely successful. The tribunes fall under the sway of Menenius's eloquence as readily as the commons. If Menenius can bring Marcius to answer his accusers peaceably, all may yet be well.

The next question (Act iii. Scene 2) is, What will he be able to do with Coriolanus? His chance of success with him lies in a Roman nobleman's regard for his order, and it is to this that Menenius himself and Volumnia, who enlists herself in the same service, appeal. The first circumstance which suggests to Coriolanus the possibility that he has been foolish, is the discovery that his mother does not go with him. "I muse my mother does not approve me further"; and in his remonstrance he gives us the key to his error, viz. his false pride. "Would you have me false to my nature? Rather say, I play the man I am." It is she who first brings home to him the impolicy of his action in being over-ready to show his hand; and while displaying equal hostility to the people as a class, she advocates a more politic treatment of their susceptibilities. She follows up the impression she has made by an appeal to the conduct of war.

> "I have heard you say,
> Honour and policy, like unsevered friends,
> I' the war do grow together. Grant that, and tell me

> In peace what each of them by th' other lose,
> That they combine not there."

Even Coriolanus cannot resist this appeal to his own expressed opinion, and when Volumnia points out to him a plan of action, and even sketches the outlines of a conciliatory speech, he agrees to play his part as directed, though he says—

> "You have put me now to such a part which never
> I shall discharge to the life."

The word is "mildly."

Now such a reconciliation as would probably be the result of Coriolanus's new policy (supposing him to be equal to his part) would be fatal to the tribunes, and while the nobles have been schooling Coriolanus in his part, they (Act iii. Scene 3) have been perfecting the populace in theirs. The indictment was to be under three heads. First, Coriolanus was to be accused of aiming at a tyranny. If this failed, and it was likely it should, for Coriolanus had shown no ambition for himself, only for his order, he was to be charged with envy to the people. By this was probably meant in general his customary contempt and hatred, and in particular his desire to abolish the tribunate. As a last resort, the circumstance that the Volscian spoil had not been distributed was to be laid at his door. The whole matter was to be arranged by the tribunes themselves. They were to be the fuglemen, and the duty of the people was merely to cry ditto to any course their leaders might take. Sicinius was to give the word—

"And when they hear me say, 'It shall be so
I' the right and strength o' the commons' (be it either
For death, for fine, or banishment), then let them,
If I say fine, cry 'Fine'; if death, cry 'Death':
Insisting on the old prerogative
And power i' the truth o' the cause."

This is the tribunes' order, and the ædile was to get the people together and explain what was required of them. The next thing to be done was to ensure that Coriolanus should not get a fair chance of stating his case. He was "to be put to choler straight . . . then he speaks what is in his heart; and that is there which looks with us to break his neck."

Coriolanus, however, plays his part well. He expresses his contentment to "submit to the voice of the people" and to "allow their officers," and Menenius helps out the brevity of his address by repeating that he is a soldier, whose rough mode of speech is not to be taken as malicious. But in the long-run the tribunes' strategy succeeds. The charge of aiming at a "tyranny," which Coriolanus knows to be untrue, completely upsets his equanimity, and he gives the lie to the tribune's face. This is precisely what Sicinius had aimed at, and without giving a moment's time for reflection, he pronounces sentence of banishment, and the populace, docile to the ædile's lesson, play the part assigned to them. Even the good Cominius is refused a hearing, and in a paroxysm of excitement the Roman commonalty cheer their tribunes to the echo. Intoxicated with success,

Sicinius and Brutus demand the honour of a guard. It is the proudest moment of their lives.

Meanwhile (Act iv. Scene 1), two courses are open to Coriolanus. He may accept his banishment, or he may attempt to resist by force of arms. Without hesitation he chooses the former. Law as law was as sacred to a Roman as to an Englishman, and the possibility of resistance to what after all was a legal decision does not seem to have occurred to any one. Nothing can be more striking than the increase in magnanimity which follows the termination of the struggle. Coriolanus is never grander than at the moment when he sets out into the world an exile. On the other hand (Act iv. Scene 2), the tribunes seem to be troubled with some little uncertainty as to the success of their policy. They feel awkward in the presence of Volumnia, and would avoid her if they could. Even the hypothesis that she is mad hardly serves to make her home-thrusts agreeable. And what are Rome's enemies doing the while? Her necessity is their opportunity, and we learn (Act iv. Scene 3) that the Volscian power is again on foot, and that the Romans, this time without Coriolanus, are again to confront their ancient enemies. It is now that Coriolanus makes his great mistake. Hitherto his defects might have been tolerated because of his real patriotism, in which he showed to such advantage by the side of the self-seeking tribunes; but it is quite intolerable that he should join himself (Act iv. Scene 4) with Rome's enemies, and consent to lead

them against his countrymen, simply because a section of his fellow-citizens had allowed themselves to be persuaded into pronouncing his exile. Such, however, was the action of the historical Coriolanus, and in such a matter Shakespeare was bound to follow the original. It is clear, however, that he felt the inconsistency of the action, and he took pains to place in the mouth of his hero a soliloquy which might to some extent explain his conduct.

> " O world, thy slippery turns ! Friends now fast sworn,
> Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
> Whose hours, whose bed, whose meal, and exercise,
> Are still together, who twin, as 'twere, in love
> Unseparable, shall within this hour,
> On a dissension of a doit, break out
> To bitterest enmity : so fellest foes,
> Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep
> To take the one the other, by some chance,
> Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends,
> And interjoin their issues. So with me :
> My birthplace hate I, and my love's upon
> This enemy town.—I'll enter : if he slay me,
> He does fair justice ; if he give me way,
> I'll do his country service."

It is noteworthy that Coriolanus says no word at Rome of his intended secession to Antium. We can hardly believe that it would have gained the good word of Menenius and Cominius. Had it then been in his mind he would hardly have said—

> "While I remain above the ground, you shall
> Hear from me still: and never of me aught
> But what is like me formerly."

But in brooding over his misfortunes he has involved both patricians and plebeians in a common responsibility. His own share in the catastrophe he has apparently forgotten.

> "The cruelty and envy of the people,
> Permitted by our dastard nobles, who
> Have all forsook me, . . .
> And suffered me, by the voice of slaves, to be
> Whooped out of Rome."

It is in this spirit that he throws himself (Act iv. Scene 5) upon the mercy of Aufidius. The Volscian leader, far from rejecting the unexpected guest, gives him a gracious and even enthusiastic welcome. He declares his intention of parting with the half of his command, and Coriolanus is to have the ruling voice in deciding the strategy of the campaign. Aufidius will gladly be his brother-in-arms. All Corioli exults in the coming overthrow of their hated rivals.

But while this avalanche of invasion is in preparation, what are the Romans doing? In Act iv. Scene 6 Shakespeare answers. There we see the tribunes pluming themselves on the success of their policy. The fact, so patent to the well-trained patricians, that

> "The Volsces stand but as at first,
> Ready when time shall prompt them, to make road
> Upon's again,"

has entirely slipped from their memory. It is inconceivable in their eyes that any one could be so wicked as to attack

> "Our tradesmen singing in their shops, and going
> About their functions friendly,"

especially during the tribuneship of two such excellent statesmen as Brutus and Sicinius imagine themselves to be. "Coriolanus," they say, "is not much missed"; and the commonwealth stands as before. Nor is a slight start sufficient to rouse these self-satisfied demagogues from their lethargy. The arrival of a slave, who brings news of the invasion of the territory of Rome by two Volscian armies, is quite insufficient to do so. With a policy worthy of the ostrich, which hides its head in the sand and imagines the danger to have passed away, the tribunes meet the peril by casting the slave into prison, and declaring his news to be false.

"It cannot be," they say, "the Volsces dare break with us."

They "know this cannot be."

Such folly only serves to accentuate the gravity of the crisis. There is no doubt of the truth of the news; and even Menenius, patriotic as he is, can hardly conceal his satisfaction in the discomfiture of the conceited and incompetent tribunes.

> "You have made good work,
> You and your apron-men; you that stood so much

Upon the voice of occupation and
The breath of garlic-eaters!"

At the first announcement of danger, however, the citizens recognise the mistake they have made in following the counsels of the unpatriotic tribunes. Glad indeed would they be to have Coriolanus back again. Each of them believes that his mind misgave him when he repeated the parrot-cry for banishment at the beck and call of Sicinius. And what irony of fate it is! Even before Coriolanus had reached Antium, the Volsces were on foot (Act iv. Scene 3). Had he but kept himself in retirement, yet within call, he would now have been reinstated by a popular vote, and the discomfiture of the tribunes would have been complete. But he had put himself in the wrong by joining the foes of Rome, and there is nothing for it but that his destiny should be worked out.

But while all Rome is in dismay, and the tribunes are declaring their readiness to give "half their wealth" if the news were false, all is not going well with Coriolanus. The unnatural position in which he is placed is shown by a conversation between Aufidius and his lieutenant (Act iv. Scene 7), from which we learn that the enthusiasm displayed for Coriolanus has bred envy in the mind of Aufidius. His real hate, which has returned fourfold after his temporary and precipitate reconciliation, makes the intellect of Aufidius quick to perceive the weak points of Coriolanus's position, and with accuracy he places his finger on want of judgment

as the cause of his misfortunes; but whether it be that or no, failure lies before him. Defeat or victory will alike be fatal to the man who has raised his arm against his country.

> "When, Caius, Rome is thine,
> Thou art poor'st of all; then shortly art thou mine."

Act v. Scene 1 shows a further development of the plot. All Rome cannot move Coriolanus to mercy. Cominius has been repelled. The tribunes dare not go for very shame; Menenius will not make the attempt. But while Shakespeare lays stress upon the degradation which the tribunes have brought on their city by thinking the supplying of "cheap coals" to be the only duty of a statesman, he does not fail to call attention to the want of balance of Coriolanus, even in his revenge. It was the part of divine mercy to spare a city for the sake of five righteous inhabitants. Yet Coriolanus will not spare the city, even for the sake of wife, mother, and child.

A journey of Menenius to the Volscian camp is the only suggestion that the tribunes can offer. Surely the subtle tongue which so often has turned the rabble can do the same with Coriolanus. If he will not do it for their sake, will he not do it for Rome? This appeal to his patriotism sets Menenius afoot. He will go; and haply, former failures have been due to a want of address in speech, and to an inopportuneness in the time of entreaty. He himself will do better. But he fails (Act v. Scene 2). Coriolanus, with a certain

nobility of perverseness, repels his entreaties, and setting his sense of honour to his allies against the claims of ancient friendship, vows that "another word he will not hear him speak." Even the Volscians are amazed at the tenacity of his resolution (Act v. Scene 3). But the strain is terrible. Coriolanus himself feels that another such scene must undo him. Henceforth he will receive no embassies. But ere he can give effect to this resolution, another train of suppliants are at his knees. His wife comes foremost; then his mother, leading his only child. To steel himself for the trial Coriolanus makes a supreme effort. Nature herself has risen up against him, but he will

> "never
> Be such a gosling to obey instinct; but stand
> As if a man were author of himself,
> And knew no other kin."

But can he? That is the question Shakespeare sets himself to answer. And he answers—No. Coriolanus, like Lear, is a man who "hath ever but slenderly known himself," and he is as wrong now as ever. From the moment when Coriolanus so far forgets himself as to impress a kiss upon his wife's lips, it is plain that his capitulation to nature is only a question of time, and from that moment Coriolanus's better man seems to recover itself. He showed himself more noble than before, when he was driven into exile. He was at his worst when he allowed his passion to drive him to

treachery. He is at his greatest when he allows nature and patriotism to resume their sway. He is greater in his yielding than he was in his tenacity.

But even here his judgment failed him. Between the two camps there was no half-way house. His position was one in which compromise was for once impossible. He must either be wholly Roman or wholly Volsce. To lead the Volscians to the very brink of success and then to call them off their prey might be possible for a countryman; for a political exile it was out of the question. Even though submitted to for a moment, a charge of treachery must inevitably follow upon such tergiversation. Nor does Shakespeare omit (in Act v. Scenes 4 and 5) to bring this out. In a rapture of gratitude, the Romans have wholly forgotten their resentment. Even the tribunes own their folly, and for once place a true estimate on their own value. All that is wanted is the presence of Coriolanus, to make him the most popular and the most powerful man in the State.

But he is not there. He has turned his back upon the city of his birth, which now longed for him, and was returning with the disappointed Volsces, who must inevitably come to hate him. The truth of the situation is perfectly obvious to the cunning Aufidius. Envy, disappointment, revenge—all spur him on. He will strike at his rival ere the real value of the peace which Coriolanus brings with him can have time to weigh with the people. And Aufidius carries his plot

to a successful conclusion. Coriolanus, angered as against the tribunes, loses his control over himself. The populace of Antium, as fickle as those of Rome, turn against him. He has, in truth, placed himself in the lists to fight single against nature, and he perishes. Yet even in his death he is grander than he who takes his life. No one who reads the last scene would take Aufidius's place. Nor would one take those of the tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius. Coriolanus may have made mistakes; in joining the Volscians he may even have been guilty of a grievous sin against Rome. Yet there is an element of grandeur about him which is wanting in his opponents, and one which Shakespeare was well aware that no military nation could afford to despise. After all, it was to such men as Coriolanus, and not to unpatriotic demagogues like the tribunes, that Rome owed her greatness and her fame.

THE TEMPEST

Part I

It is hardly necessary to say that, to an English audience of the time of James I., the title of the play which we are about to study was likely to be very attractive. It was an age of maritime discovery and adventure, when the wonders of new-found lands and the hairbreadth escapes of explorers were in every mouth. At such a time the prospect of seeing the representation of a tempest would be certain to draw a crowded audience. Nor were those who came disappointed, for the opening scene of the play gave as realistic a description of the terror and confusion of a tempest as can anywhere be found in literature.

But amidst the hurly-burly of the storm what is the thought brought home to us in the first scene? Is it not the powerlessness of man in deadly struggle with the overmastering violence of the elements? The coolness of the master, the noisy efficiency of the boatswain, the handiness of the crew, the readiness of resource with which they meet the changing dangers of

the storm are seen to be in vain. An overruling *something* seems to mar their best endeavours, and to make frustrate all their skill. Yet, in the hands of Shakespeare, the situation is not without its humorous side. The passengers in the doomed ship are a king and his courtiers, whose terror displays itself in officious interference with the duties of the crew, and is in marked and striking contrast with the serious energy of the boatswain, from whom the nearness of impending death calls forth a language of passion which occasionally rises to sublimity. His character is the very opposite of that imputed to him by the courtiers. "What care these roarers for the name of king?" is the speech of a man on whom habitual conflict with the elements had enforced a regard for the realities of life. His "Make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap," as the alternative to work, and his "Cheerly, good hearts!" to his crew, while he shows himself fully alive to the danger, are the phrases of no gallows-bird, but speak of the true courage and resource which have in all times been characteristic of those who go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters.

But as regards the progress of the plot, we learn from the first scene that a good ship, which bears as her passengers a king and his suite, and is manned by an efficient and courageous company of mariners, is driven by the violence of the storm upon a lee shore, and apparently wrecked, with the loss of all hands.

In the next scene (Act i. Scene 2) the explanation of this untoward event is given to us. The characters revealed upon the stage are an elderly man and his daughter, a girl of some fourteen summers—a favourite age with Shakespeare. He is dressed in the mantle which the conventionality of the day regarded as the appropriate garb of a wizard. They are standing before a cell, and indications are given that the scene has been shifted to an island. The first words of Miranda suggest the key which is necessary to explain the riddle of the wreck.

> "If by your art, my dearest father, you have
> Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them."

The sight of the disaster has been too much for the tenderness of her woman's heart.

> "O, I have suffered
> With those that I saw suffer! a brave vessel,
> Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her,
> Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
> Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished."

And then she turns upon her wizard father, to whose *art* she clearly attributed this, as it appeared, wanton destruction of human life.

> "Had I been any god of power, I would
> Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
> It should the good ship so have swallowed and
> The fraughting souls within her."

But Prospero is no deliberate villain, and he at once relieves the fears both of Miranda and of the audience.

"Be collected:
No more amazement: tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done.

Mir. O, woe the day!

Pros. No harm.
I have done nothing but in care of thee,
Of thee, my dear one—thee, my daughter, who
Art ignorant of what thou art, nought knowing
Of whence I am, nor that I am more better
Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell,
And thy no greater father."

In this sentence Shakespeare brings before his audience the knot which, for their pleasure, he is to unravel. His next business is to explain for their information the circumstances which have been antecedent to the tempest and wreck. In deciding how to do this, Shakespeare had to deal with one of the most difficult problems of literary construction. Of all ways of telling a story, the most obvious is the chronological, but it is by no means the most artistic. Homer and Virgil alike plunge *in medias res*, and place the narrative of earlier events as a story in the mouth of their hero. In like manner the audience of the *Tempest* hear the story from Prospero. We should note, however, the art with which the story is told. It is a long one, and if given as an unbroken narrative would have been monotonous and unpleasing. Shakespeare, therefore, displays his usual judgment by breaking it up; and he does so partly by making Prospero examine Miranda, to see how much she

remembers of her early life, and afterwards, when he enters upon the full swing of his narration, by making him break off at intervals to test her full attention. Such breaks were, indeed, hardly necessary, for Prospero's tale is one, as Miranda says, "to cure deafness."

Twelve years since he was Duke of Milan, and a prince of power; but being beguiled by a devotion to the liberal arts, he had committed what was, in Shakespeare's view, a flagrant dereliction of duty, for he had handed over the functions of government to his brother Antonio. In Shakespeare's eyes kings have no more business than other men to neglect the duties allotted to them, and the punishment of Prospero's very serious fault was that Antonio usurped his position in the state. Not that Prospero's error could be pleaded as an excuse for Antonio's unbrotherly crime. Each had to bear his own burden; but, as Prospero confesses, it was his own preference of study to business which "in his false brother had awakened an evil nature." And hence, "his ambition growing," he had confederated himself with the King of Naples, and by a promise to hold Milan as a fief of that country, had secured the co-operation of a Neapolitan army. By its aid he had made himself master of Milan, and turned the lawful duke and his daughter adrift in an open and unseaworthy boat.

Antonio's design had stayed little, if at all, short of actual murder; but by the kindly attention of a

Neapolitan, Gonzalo,—who, being under the orders of his master, had no responsibility for the treacherous action in which he was engaged,—the castaways were provided with food and water,

> "With
> Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessaries,
> Which since have steaded much ; so of his gentleness,
> Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me
> From mine own library with volumes that
> I prize above my dukedom."

Such, then, is the history of the pair ; and as Prospero further explains,

> "By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
> Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
> Brought to this shore ; and by my prescience
> I find my zenith doth depend upon
> A most auspicious star, whose influence
> If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
> Will ever after droop."

During the earlier part of his narrative Prospero had doffed his mantle, but before his last speech he resumes it, and gives the audience an insight into his power by sending to Miranda a sleep to which she "cannot choose" but give way.

We are now in a position to see the play, so far as it has gone, as a whole. The Antonio of the wreck is clearly the usurping Duke of Milan. His attitude in face of imminent death shows him to be still the same hard-hearted schemer as of old. Gonzalo, the good-

natured Neapolitan courtier, is still alive, and if somewhat more inconsequent, is as kindly as ever. So, too, is Alonso, the King of Naples. One character, Sebastian, will require further elucidation. Of him we know, as yet, nothing.

The next business of Shakespeare is to explain something of the machinery by which Prospero works, and to do this he brings on the stage the spirit Ariel, daintiest and most intelligent of sprites, who serves him, not as a mere slave enchained to service by magical art, but as grateful for an inestimable service by which he regained his freedom. It is Ariel who has managed the storm, and who, as his special function, has darted like St. Elmo's fire from yard-arm to bowsprit, from topmast to deck, a sight to appal the most valiant.

> "Not a soul
> But felt a fever of the mad, and played
> Some tricks of desperation. All but mariners
> Plunged in the foaming brine, and quit the vessel,
> Then all afire with me : the king's son, Ferdinand,
> With hair upstarting,—then like reeds, not hair,—
> Was the first man that leaped ; cried, 'Hell is empty,
> And all the devils are here.'"

Yet, in spite of this headlong leap, not a soul has perished. All the king's party are landed, but by Ariel's wiles they are dispersed throughout the land, and in especial, the king's son Ferdinand is by himself, and a prey to hopeless despair. As for the fleet

at large, it is now homeward bound to Naples, in full belief that the king's ship and all therein had perished before their eyes.

The narrative of Ariel's exploits completed, the time arrives for Miranda to throw off her magic sleep, and her father at once proposes a visit to Caliban, his slave. In regard to him, one of the most imaginative of Shakespeare creations, the curiosity of the audience has already been aroused. For in the course of the conversation between Ariel and Prospero it has been stated that he was the son of Sycorax, a witch, who, "for mischiefs manifold and sorceries, was banished from Argier," and turned loose upon the then uninhabited island. On Sycorax's death Caliban had been lord of the country, himself its sole inhabitant, but had in his turn fallen under the despotism of Prospero.

Whether under the name Caliban Shakespeare meant in an anagram to conceal the word "cannibal" can never be known, but it is certain that the relations between Prospero and Caliban bring to mind many of the problems which arise from the existence of inhabitants of a lower stage of civilisation on lands newly discovered and settled by Europeans. Caliban is the untutored savage. His language speaks the poetry and imaginativeness which are the property of the child of nature. By what right should Prospero claim his menial service? Of what advantage to him were education and the restraints of morality? Was he happier or better for contact with a superior civilisation?

Were it not better for both parties that he should be let alone? "But," says Prospero,

> "We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,
> Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
> That profit us."

This is the exact plea which civilisation always makes to explain the servitude of its inferiors. It is the tyrant's plea, necessity, and the history of Caliban's subjection is precisely that of the Indians of the New World. At first he was all amenity, and so was his visitor.

> "When thou camest first,
> Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee
> And showed thee all the qualities o' the isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
> Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
> Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o' the island."

Such is Caliban's version of the history of his enslavement, but civilised man has a different tale to tell.

> "Thou most lying slave,
> Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,
> Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee

> In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
> The honour of my child."

It is all true. Between civilisation and savagery there is a gulf fixed which cannot in a moment be spanned. It must even be a question how far the first steps towards civilisation taken by the savage, under the tuition of his superior, do not do him more harm than good. There is much in Caliban's retort,

> "You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse."

The conversation with Caliban gives time for Prospero's other servant Ariel to fulfil a new mission. As a wandering music he has beguiled the ear of the desolate Ferdinand, and has led him from his "odd angle of the isle" to Prospero's presence. The appearance of the handsome prince at once enchants the unsophisticated or rather natural-minded Miranda. She

> "Might call him
> A thing divine, for nothing natural
> I ever saw so noble."

Nor, to the delight of Prospero, is Ferdinand less affected by the sight of Miranda.

> "Most sure, the goddess
> On whom these airs attend!"

His one fear is that she is already married. But Prospero knows too well that lightly got is lightly held, and he determines to throw in the way of the lovers

the obstacles which are said always to trouble the course of true love. In his delight at hearing from Miranda's lips the language of Italy, Ferdinand has let fall words which imply his claim to the Neapolitan crown, and Prospero seizes on this to accuse him of treacherous intent. "To see the nakedness of the land thou art come."

> "Thou dost here usurp
> The name thou owest [ownest] not; and hast put thyself
> Upon this island as a spy, to win it
> From me, the lord on't."

Is there in this speech just a touch of sarcasm on Prospero himself, who had done the same by Caliban?

The accusation against Ferdinand at once turns Miranda into his eager champion.

> "There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple:
> If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
> Good things will strive to dwell with't."

Here for once love is right, but is not Miranda's trust typical of what hath led many a one to her undoing? For her, Ferdinand is the only man. It is useless for prudent Prospero to appeal to common-sense.

> "Thou think'st there are no more such shapes as he,
> Having seen but him and Caliban: foolish wench!
> To the most of men this is a Caliban,
> And they to him are angels.
> *Mir.* My affections
> Are then most humble; I have no ambition
> To see a goodlier man."

The spell which is to redress the wrongs of Prospero and to unite Naples and Milan in loving alliance is full at work; but it is still Prospero's *rôle* to speak rudely to the suitor and subject him by his art to his commands, and to set him for a time such tasks as were the lot of Caliban himself. We have now learned something of Prospero and his daughter, and can make some guess at the *denoûment* of the play; but Shakespeare had in his mind more than a mere love-piece, so we now (Act ii. Scene 1) turn to follow the fortunes of the other members of the shipwrecked company. On another part of the island we find Alonso, Antonio, Gonzalo, of whose characters we already know something; Sebastian, Adrian, Francisco, and others, of whom we know little or nothing. Shakespeare was true to nature when he made Ferdinand's sorrow for his father's loss to be dispelled by the dawning of a new affection. His youth had all before it; but for the old man the death of his son was a stroke of mortal power. Yet not undeserved, for had not Alonso been jointly responsible for condemning Prospero and his daughter to the same fate which had now overtaken his son Ferdinand?

As might have been anticipated, the office of comforter in affliction is assigned to Gonzalo, who sets before Alonso the commonplaces of consolation. "To be wrecked is common, to escape with life is the rarity: for that, therefore, be thankful." But the king will none of his soothing, and the discomfiture of Gonzalo becomes a subject of mockery for Sebastian and Antonio.

With Shakespeare, to mock the well-meant efforts of a good man was distinctly an evil action, and it is designed here to strengthen the feeling of repugnance to Sebastian and Antonio, which as regards both was excited by their attitude during the storm, and in the latter by what we have learned by his usurpation from Prospero. Their raillery leads to a discussion of the marriage made between Claribel and the Prince of Tunis, a Moor. It was an unscrupulous act of policy, exactly like that by which Alonso had twelve years before accepted the proposals of Antonio ; and it was done by the royal will in opposition not only to the advice of his council, but in spite of the reluctance of the princess herself, a type of many a royal match. Though ill-mannered, every word uttered by the hard-hearted Sebastian is perfectly true.

"Sir, you may thank yourself for this great loss,
That would not bless our Europe with your daughter,
But rather lose her to an African :

. . . . . .

You were kneeled to and importuned otherwise
By all of us, and the fair soul herself
Weighed, between loathness and obedience, at
Which end the beam should bow. We have lost your son,
I fear, for ever ; Milan and Naples have
More widows in them of this business' making
Than we bring men to comfort them :
The fault's your own."

As a diversion for the king's grief, Gonzalo strives to turn the conversation by a jocular forecast of what

he would do supposing he had the colonisation of the island ; and by his mouth Shakespeare may be poking fun at some of the Utopian schemes of which colonies, or "plantations" as they were called in his day, were expected to be the realisation, and which are not wholly without their advocates at the present day.

> "I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things : for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit ; no name of magistrate ;
> Letters should not be known ; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none ; contract, succession,
> Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none ;
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil ;
> No occupation ; all men idle, all.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavour ; treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have ; but nature should bring forth,
> Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people."

So far the audience know of Antonio's plot against Prospero merely from the evidence of the banished duke ; but that proof, like the assertion of the ghost in *Hamlet*, needs corroboration to be fully accepted. Shakespeare's next business, therefore, is to produce such proof, and he contrives to do it in such a manner that not only is Prospero's narrative confirmed, but the present wickedness of the plotters is conclusively exhibited, and also the audience have enacted before their eyes the creation

of a plot similar in character to that of which they have previously heard. For this purpose, remembering always that Prospero has by his magic arts complete control, not indeed over the thoughts of men, but over the external conditions under which they act, we see Ariel sent to lull into a magical sleep all the king's party except Antonio and Sebastian. He so creates a situation eminently calculated to suggest to such a mind as Antonio's the possibility of a new conspiracy. Acting in accordance with Shakespeare's own adage that "ofttimes the sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done," Antonio no sooner finds himself awake with Sebastian, while the king and his friends are sleeping around them, than the idea of killing the king and so advancing his friend Sebastian to the kingdom crosses his mind. He immediately proceeds to broach the project to his friend. The manner of his doing so is extremely ingenious. At first he will raise in Sebastian's mind a mere suggestion of possibility. "What might, worthy Sebastian?—What might?—No more." And then, doubtless seeing that Sebastian's attention has been sufficiently aroused, he adds flatteringly,

> "And yet methinks I see it in thy face,
> What thou shouldst be; the occasion speaks thee, and
> My strong imagination sees a crown
> Dropping upon thy head."

At first Sebastian takes the words as being a waking dream of Antonio, and makes no sign. Antonio,

seeing that Sebastian expresses no repugnance, ventures further.

> "Noble Sebastian,
> Thou lett'st thy fortune sleep, die rather ; wink'st
> Whiles thou art waking."

Sebastian takes his meaning, and answers—

> "Thou dost snore distinctly ;
> There's meaning in thy snores."

He is, he says, "standing water." That is, his mind is made up neither way. He is ready to be taught "to flow"; to ebb, his "hereditary sloth instructs him."

The first question to be decided is whether Ferdinand, the king's son, is dead. If he is, who is the next heir to Naples? Claribel; but she is distant and dependent for information on news from Naples. In present action she can take no part. Let her "keep in Tunis, and let Sebastian wake." One speech more and Antonio has revealed his intent.

> "Say this were death
> That now hath seized them ; why, they were no worse
> Than now they are. There be that can rule Naples
> As well as he that sleeps ; lords that can prate
> As amply and unnecessarily
> As this Gonzalo. . . .
> . . . O, that you bore
> The mind that I do ! what a sleep were this
> For your advancement ! Do you understand me ?"

In all this colloquy Antonio has been the tempter, Sebastian the tempted. Sebastian is a weak rather than

a bad man. His phraseology shows him to be a person of some cultivation of mind; his sympathy with the king is, so far as it goes, genuine, but he has allowed himself to fall under the influence of the sly Antonio, and has no deep-seated morality which might enable him to turn aside from the prospect of advancement which Antonio offers to him. Still he has his scruples. If to rise by crime is to be a prey to remorse, the prospect of royalty will lose its charms. On this point he will consult Antonio, who, he recollects, made himself Duke of Milan by an exactly similar crime. How is it with his conscience? Antonio answers that he feels it not. Were it a chilblain it might "put him to his slipper," but conscience, "he feels not that deity in his bosom." Hesitation is absurd. Now is Sebastian's chance, let him be a man and take it.

> "Here lies your brother,
> No better than the earth he lies upon,
> If he were that which now he's like, that's dead;
> Whom I, with this obedient steel, three inches of it,
> Can lay to bed for ever; whiles you, doing thus,
> To the perpetual wink for aye might put
> This ancient morsel, this Sir Prudence, who
> Should not upbraid our course. For all the rest,
> They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk;
> They'll tell the clock to any business that
> We say befits the hour."

Sebastian yields himself fully, and a couple of stabs would have concluded the business, when Shakespeare, who feels that enough has been done to bring home to

the audience the iniquity of Antonio, both past and present, makes Prospero, again through the agency of Ariel, give the signal for awaking. Antonio and Sebastian lose their opportunity, and have to explain their drawn swords by a somewhat lame excuse. The search for Ferdinand is then resumed, and the royal party quit the stage.

Such a scene as this would have been out of place in so happy a play had it not been for the confidence which the audience feel in the power of Prospero. It is that, and that only, which enables them to see the preparations for the murder without aversion. They can follow them unmoved because they know that Prospero can and will stay the assassins' hands. Were it otherwise, the scene would be too tragic for its place.

Part II

Hitherto Shakespeare has devoted his art to making us realise the story of Prospero, his banishment, his life on the island, his family and dependants, and the strange chance which has placed the evil-doers in his power; but now, feeling the desirability of introducing something which might serve as a foil to the seriousness of the foregoing events, he brings upon the scene something of a comic element. For Shakespeare knew very well not only that a hearty laugh is not incompatible with a genuine sympathy for the pathetic, but

that in a play which was not designed to pass the verge of comedy, laughter was absolutely necessary if the air were to be cleared after the exhibition of such a dastardly conspiracy as that of Sebastian and Antonio. Moreover, we must bear in mind that Shakespeare had to work out somewhat further the problem of the relation between savagery and civilisation which had been introduced by the creation of Caliban. Accordingly (Act ii. Scene 2), we find that monster at work upon his daily task of wood-bearing.

Like the true savage, all nature is to Caliban terrible, and all its dangers he imputes to the action of the superior power with which he is immediately acquainted. If he stumbles in the bog, if he is led astray by the will-o'-the-wisp, if an ape chatters at him from a tree, or his naked foot comes in contact with the prickles of a hedgehog, he attributes the accident to Prospero, who is punishing him for some neglect of duty. Such is ever the superstition of the savage. In Prospero Caliban curses the highest development of civilisation ; what will he do if he comes in contact with some of its baser productions ? The audience shall see presently, for here comes Trinculo, the poor jester of the Neapolitan court. Caliban seeing him, takes him for another spirit of Prospero's, and to escape notice, falls flat on the ground. Trinculo finding him in this position, takes the unknown animal for a dead islander, and remarking that "misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows," creeps under his gaberdine or smock-frock for shelter

from the storm. In this plight he is found by Stephano, a drunken butler of the king, who, having had the luck to make his way to shore upon a butt of his own wine, has furnished himself with a bottle, and is now engaged upon a drunken survey of the island. To both Trinculo and Caliban Stephano gives a drink of his liquor, and the result is to make Caliban rehearse before the audience his early attachment to Prospero. He takes the poor butler for a god. He will kiss his foot and swear himself his subject. He will make known to him all the resources of the place. The three will be the owners of the island.

Having laughed for a moment at the oddities of the drunken Stephano and his comrades, the audience next find Ferdinand at work bearing his logs (Act iii. Scene 1). But to him even the work given him as a task proves not unagreeable, for is it not lightened by love? and has not Miranda, true to her character for pity, crept hither to console and cheer his labours? In the love-making of the youthful pair, the one chivalrous, ardent, and susceptible, the other in her maidenly purity only too much overjoyed to find that the being she so much admires can return her love, we have one of the most charming of Shakespearian idylls. "Hear my soul speak," says Ferdinand—

> "The very instant that I saw you, did
> My heart fly to your service; there resides,
> To make me slave to it; and for your sake
> Am I this patient log-man.

Mir. Do you love me?
Fer. O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound,
And crown what I profess with kind event
If I speak true! if hollowly, invert
What best is boded me, to mischief! I,
Beyond all limit of what else i' the world,
Do love, prize, honour you."

While this love-making is going forward a ludicrous plot against Prospero's life is being concocted (Act iii. Scene 2), ludicrous not because it was wanting in barbarism, but because the audience, having seen the frustration of the design of Antonio and Sebastian, can no longer have serious fears for Prospero's safety. They are prepared only to laugh when they find that Caliban is inciting his new masters to a plot against Prospero.

"Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him
I' th' afternoon to sleep: there thou mayst brain him
Having first seized his books, or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his weasand with thy knife. Remember
First to possess his books; for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command: they all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books;
He has brave utensils—for so he calls them—
Which when he has a house he'll deck withal.
And that most deeply to consider is
The beauty of his daughter; he himself
Calls her a nonpareil: I never saw a woman,
But only Sycorax my dam and she;
But she as far surpasseth Sycorax
As great'st does least."

Such a plot cannot be taken seriously, and it is not intended that it should be. All things are in Prospero's hands, and the only question for resolution is the use that he will make of the opportunity which Providence has thrown in his way. With the exception of Ferdinand, Miranda, and Gonzalo, the whole of the leading characters have brought themselves under his displeasure, either by injuries done or contrived against himself or by unrepented conspiracies against others. Antonio, with the aid of Alonso and Sebastian, has robbed him of his dukedom and attempted to take his life. Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, though more ludicrous, are in no respect less guilty of murderous intention. Antonio and Sebastian are even yet in their sin. How will they be treated by omnipotent and all-knowing power?

Shakespeare's answer to this question constitutes the main interest of the concluding scenes of the play; and Prospero's conduct forms also the contrast with his former self which justifies the restoration to power that naturally follows from the discovery of his retreat. The condemnation which had been meted out upon Prospero's old addiction to the "liberal arts" was founded on the circumstance that he had given himself up to them, to the neglect of his more serious duties. The use, too, which he had made of his powers had seemingly been a selfish one, dictated by a dilettante craving for knowledge, not by a desire for its possession as a means towards greater utility. On the

island this had all been changed. Prospero appears there, not as a recluse sovereign, but as a careful tutor of his daughter and as doing his utmost to bring even to Caliban the blessings of knowledge. The uses, too, which he has made of his magical powers have been either beneficent, as when he released Ariel from his imprisoning tree, or obedient to a higher power, as when he carried out the will of Providence by raising the storm; or, at any rate, they have been exerted with a kindly intention, as when he enchained the sword of Ferdinand. And so, if restored to power, he will continue to use them.

Having given his paternal sanction to the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda (Act iv. Scene 1), he furnishes for their entertainment a masque, enacted by Ariel and his fellows, in which all the blessings of Ceres, Iris, and Juno are promised to the betrothed pair. From giving pleasure to his children he then turns his magic arts to effect the subjection of those who had wronged him, and to the warding off of the impending danger to his own life from the plot of Stephano and Trinculo. Meanwhile (Act iii. Scene 3) Alonso and his friends have been prosecuting their fruitless search for the lost prince. Weariness has overtaken them, hope has deserted them, and Sebastian and Antonio are congratulating themselves that they will soon have another chance of carrying their plot into execution. The subjection of Alonso and his fellows is entrusted to Ariel, who by the device

of providing by supernatural agency a banquet for the starving courtiers, and then by unseen hands snatching it away, brings home to them the enchantments among which they are living; and then, when they are stricken with amazement, he denounces their misdeeds. Nothing can be more striking and solemn than the speech which Ariel, at Prospero's order, addresses to the guilty men, whose minds a succession of wonders had fully attuned to the supernatural.

"*Ariel.* You are three men of sin, whom destiny,
That hath to instrument this lower world
And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea
Hath caused to belch up you; and on this island
Where man doth not inhabit; you 'mongst men
Being most unfit to live.

. . . . .

But remember—
For that's my business to you—that you three
From Milan did supplant good Prospero:
Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,
Him and his innocent child: for which foul deed
The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
They have bereft; and do pronounce by me,
Lingering perdition, worse than any death
Can be at once, shall step by step attend
You and your ways; whose wraths to guard you from—
Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls
Upon your heads—is nothing but heart's sorrow
And a clear life ensuing."

The one condition of forgiveness, "repentance," is in

exact accord with Prospero's new and almost godlike nature. Separated from the world, he has learned to look on man with feelings like those of a deity. A rare wisdom marks his every utterance, for it cannot but be that Ariel's weighty denunciation has been dictated by his master; and the gravity of his character as an avenger of crime impresses itself even upon the light-spirited Ariel. Upon Alonso the speech just quoted has an effect quite terrible. His superiority to men like Antonio and Sebastian is shown not only by his capacity for the serious thoughts which are awakened by his son's loss, but also by the way in which his awakening conscience has already begun to associate his disasters with the wrongs of Prospero.

> "O, it is monstrous, monstrous!
> Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;
> The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,
> That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
> The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass.
> Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded, and
> I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,
> And with him there lie mudded."

Suicide seems the only escape open to him. But from such a catastrophe Alonso and his fellows are saved by Prospero, who consigns them to the safe keeping of Ariel himself; and in due time strains of soft music restore the balance of their minds, and permit them to hear the sentence which Prospero, formerly their victim and now their judge (Act v.

Scene 1), pronounces upon them. He will pronounce it, however, not as a wizard, but as a fellow-man. The place of his mantle is taken by the hat and rapier of civilised life, and in this guise, as the duke that they had wronged, he thus addresses them—

[*To the King.*

"Behold, sir king,
The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero:
For more assurance that a living prince
Does now speak to thee, I embrace thy body;
And to thee and thy company I bid
A hearty welcome.

[*To Gonzalo.*

First, noble friend,
Let me embrace thine age, whose honour cannot
Be measured or confined.

[*Aside to Sebastian and Antonio.*

But you, my brace of lords, were I so minded,
I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you,
And justify you traitors: at this time
I will tell no tales.

[*To Antonio.*

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault: all of them; and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know,
Thou must restore."

Such is Prospero's godlike address to his enemies, now delivered into his power. But Prospero has something for Alonso beside forgiveness. A curtain is withdrawn, and Prospero displays to his astonished guest his son Ferdinand and the unknown Miranda playing at

chess. This discovery removes the last trace of unhappiness from the party, and it only remains to repair the material disasters which had been caused by the storm.

Ariel therefore enters with the master and the boatswain, and we learn that by his care the ship has been refitted and re-rigged, the crew all safe on shore, not a soul harmed. Nor does any serious punishment await Stephano and Trinculo. Those egregious plotters have been drawn by Ariel's wiles (Act iv. Scene 1) to seize upon some finery which had been placed in their path as a snare. While fitting it on they have been attacked by Prospero's servant sprites, disguised as dogs and hounds, and driven into a stagnant pond; and now, drenched to the skin, and pinched by a thousand cramps, they are brought before Prospero to receive their sentence. It is a very light one, merely to trim the cell in readiness to receive the company. Even Caliban is to be discharged from servitude, and Ariel, when he has fulfilled his last task, that of providing a favouring wind for the royal ship, is to be as free as elemental air.

The plot of the *Tempest* will not bear comparison, in point of interest, with those of many of Shakespeare's plays. It has nothing either of the development of character, or of the shifts and turns of fortune, which make the interest of such works as *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, and *Othello*. It is not a play of activity and movement, like those of *Macbeth* and *Richard II.* With the one exception of the storm, its progress is

placid and unexciting. But for this reason it is more appropriate for the place it occupies in Shakespeare's life. For it may be regarded as representing above all things the tranquillity of age. Its keynotes are forgiveness of injuries and reconciliation of friends, and when he had written it, Shakespeare, like Prospero, broke his wand, and laid aside his pen.

Nor is the play without other points of interest which are special to itself. It is that in which Shakespeare adheres most closely to the classic unities of time, place, and fable. The period occupied by its events are all comprised within about six hours, little more than the length of time needful for their representation, which was one of the conditions on which the French votaries of correct writing were accustomed to lay so much stress. The distances to be traversed by the imagination were not long, being confined to one small island and its coast. The story all centres round one character, Prospero, and in its action all the characters have more or less to do with him and with each other. But besides these technical excellences, which, however, are not entirely without their corresponding drawbacks, and which in this play are balanced by defects to which a devotee of the correct school might well take exception, there are many points of interest in the play which call for particular notice.

First among these is the painting of character. Nowhere in Shakespeare is there represented a more godlike man, if we may use the term, than Prospero.

There is in him a lofty superiority to human weakness and passion which has been developed by the sense of power, and by the workings of experience and observation. He is equally the critic of his former self and of his fellow-men. Formerly selfish, and an example of the slothfulness which lies, as Bacon says, in overmuch study, he has learnt to apply his powers to beneficent purposes. His best qualities have been drawn out by misfortune, and by the discipline of caring for his daughter. Thought for her welfare has become the guiding principle of his life. So long as her injuries are repaired he can afford forgiveness to those who have wronged himself. Yet even in Prospero this attitude was not attained without a severe internal struggle. To have his enemies in his power was the severest trial of any man's benevolence.

> "Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part: the rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further."

Nor is the quality of Prospero's mercy strained; it is extended even to the vile and unrepentant Antonio as well as to the already punished and repentant Alonso. But there is even here a difference. Antonio is forgiven, but not received into favour—justice can never permit him to stand on the same level as Alonso, still less on that of the old and well-beloved friend of all men,

Gonzalo. Yet even at the moment when one feels most the magnanimity of Prospero, one recognises plainly the undesirability of powers like his being made the common property of man. In the hands of the bad such art as his were fatal to the commonwealth of humanity. Sycorax, their possessor, was rightly driven out from Argier; and it is with propriety that Prospero, on returning to live among his fellows, is said to break his wand and sink his book.

And what of Prospero's attendants, Ariel and Caliban? Ariel represents the spirit of intelligent freedom, whose greatest punishment was to be debarred from activity by imprisonment. As the very opposite of malignant Sycorax, her service only generates antipathy; but under Prospero he is swayed by two motives, gratitude and respect, and these make him the efficient servant of a superior intelligence. Caliban, on the other hand, is gross and material. In him the animal nature, altogether absent in Ariel, is predominant; to be a hewer of wood and drawer of water is his natural employ. All Prospero's efforts to awaken a consciousness of morality are in vain. Education without morality makes him no better.

> "You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse."

The attempt to civilise him has been an utter failure, and he is probably happier when the royal party has left the island, and himself has become again his own king.

Everywhere, therefore, we have restitution. The banished and dethroned Prospero regains his lost duchy and his native land. Alonso receives a new daughter, Miranda, in place of the departed Claribel. Ariel regains his liberty, Caliban his island, the mariners their ship, the courtiers their lives. Not a single false note mars the happy ending of the plot; and having given to the world his final message of peace and good-will, Shakespeare, like Prospero, broke his magic wand and writ no more.

THE END

Printed by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh.*

100278

PR
2976
R3

Ransome, Cyril.
Short studies of
Shakespeare's plots.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER
PR2976.R3
Short studies of Shakespeare's plots,
0 00 01 0089505 1